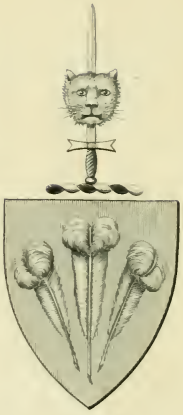

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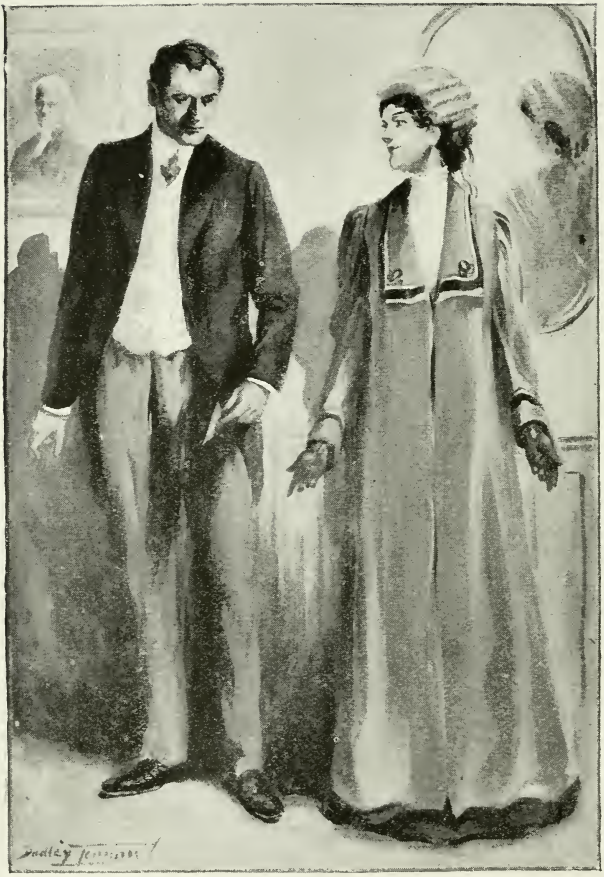

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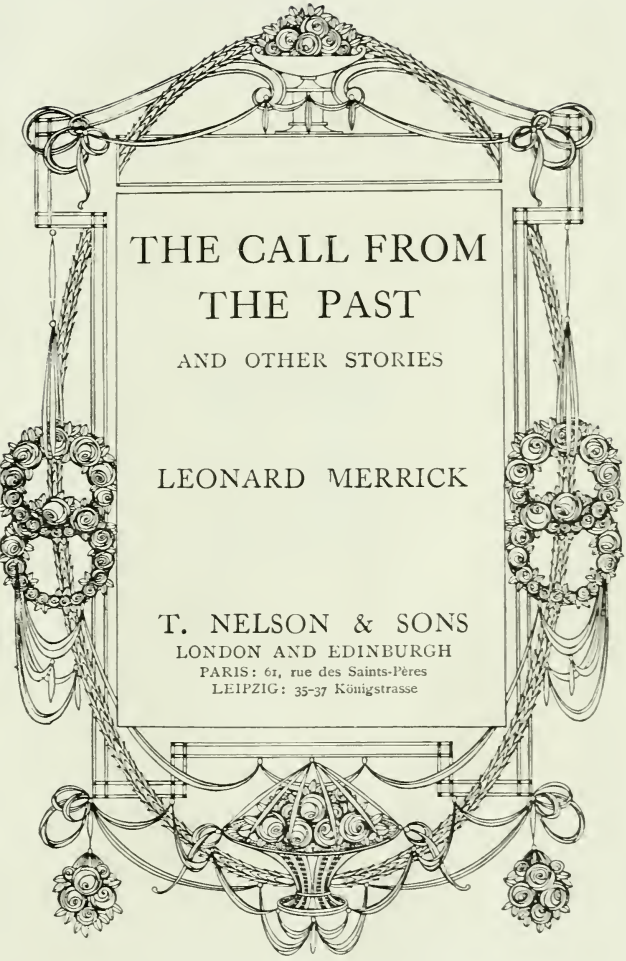

THE CALL FROM THE PAST

AND OTHER STORIES

LEONARD MERRICK

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I

THE TRAGEDY OF A COMIC SONG

I LIKE to monopolise a table in a restaurant, unless a friend is with me, so I resented the young man's presence. Besides, he had a melancholy face. If it hadn't been for the piano-organ, I don't suppose I should have spoken to him. As the organ that was afflicting Lisle Street began to volley a comic song of a day that was dead, he started.

"That tune!" he murmured in French. If I did not deceive myself, tears sprang to his eyes.

I was curious. Certainly, on both sides of the Channel, we had long ago had more than enough of the tune; no self-respecting organ-grinder rattled it now. That the young Frenchman should wince at the tune I understood. But that he should weep!

Yes, I was curious; I smiled sympathetically. "We suffered from it over here as well," I remarked.

"I did not know," he said, in English that reproved my French, "it was sung in London also—'Partant pour le Moulin'?"

"Under another name," I told him, "it was an epidemic."

Clearly, the organ had stirred distressing memories in him, for though we fell to chatting, I could see that he neither talked nor dined with any relish. As luck would have it, too, the instrument of torture resumed its répertoire well within hearing, and when "Partant pour le Moulin" was reached again, he clasped his head.

"You find it so painful?" I inquired.

"Painful?" he exclaimed. "Monsieur, it is my 'istory, that comic tune! It is to me romance, tragedy, ruin. Will you hear? I shall arrange my thoughts. Listen."

It is Paris, Montmartre—we are at the door of a laundress. A girl approaches. Her gaze is troubled, she frowns a little. What ails her? I shall tell you: the laundress has refused to deliver her washing until her bill is paid. And the girl, the girl cannot pay it —not till Saturday—and she has need of things to put on. It is a moment the most anxious.

She opens the door. Some minutes pass. The girl reappears—under her arm a little parcel. Good! She has triumphed. As she comes out she sees a young man, pale, abstracted, who stands before the shop. He does not attempt to enter. He stands motionless, regarding the window with an air forlorn.

"Aha," she says to herself, "here is another customer who cannot pay his bill!"

But wait a little. After 'alf an hour what happens but she sees the young man again! This time he

stands before a modest restaurant. Does he go in? No, again no! He regards the window sorrowfully. He sighs. The dejection of his attitude would melt a stone.

"Poor boy," she has thought; "also he cannot pay for a dinner!"

Still the affair is not finished. How beautiful it is the summer day!—she resolves to promenade. Figure yourself that once more she perceives the young man. Now it is before the Mont de Piété, the pawnbroker's, that he stands. She watches him attentively. Here, at least, he will enter, she does not doubt. She is wrong. It is the same thing—he regards, he laments, he turns away.

"O mon Dieu!" she has said. "Even nothing remains to him to pawn!"

It is too much! She has addressed him:

"Monsieur!"

But, when she has said "Monsieur," there is the question how she shall continue. Now the young man regards the girl instead of the pawnbroker's. Her features are pretty—or "pretty well"; her costume has been made at 'ome, but it is not bad; and she has chic—above all she has chic. He asks:

"What can I have the pleasure to do for you?"

Observe that she is bohemian, and he also. The conversation has been like this:

"Monsieur, three times this morning I have seen you. It has been impossible that I resist speaking. You are in grief?"

"Frightful!" he has said.

"Perhaps," she has added timidly, "you are also hungry?"

"With a hunger insupportable, mademoiselle."

"I myself am extremely hard up, monsieur, but will you permit that I offer you what is in my power?"

"Angel!" the young man exclaimed. "There must be wings under your cape, but I beg of you not to fly yet. I shall tell you the reason of my grief. If you will do me the honour to seat yourself at the café opposite, we shall be in a position to talk more pleasantly."

This appeared strange enough, this invitation from a young man who she had supposed was starving; but wait a little! Her amazement increased when, to pay for the wine he ordered, her companion threw on to the table a bank-note with a gesture absolutely careless.

She was in danger of distrusting her eyes.

"Is it a dream?" she cried. "Is it a vision from the *Thousand and One Nights*, or is it, indeed, a bank-note?"

"Mademoiselle, it is the mess of pottage," the young man answered gloomily. "It is the cause of my sadness; for that miserable money, and more to come, I have sold my birthright."

She was on a ship—no, what is it, your expression? —"at sea"!

"I am a poet," he explained; "however, you may not know my work, I am not celebrated; I am Tricotrin, mademoiselle—Gustave Tricotrin, at your feet. For years I have written, supported by ambition, and an uncle, who manufactures silk in Lyons. Well, the time is arrived when he is monstrous, my uncle. He says, 'Gustave, this cannot last—you make no

living, you make nothing but debts. (My tragedies he has ignored.) Either you must be a poet who makes money, or you must be a partner who makes silk.' How could I defy him?—he holds the purse. It was unavoidable that I stooped. He has given me a sum to satisfy my creditors, and on Monday I depart for Lyons. In the meantime, I take tender farewells of the familiar scenes I may never behold again."

"How I have been mistaken!" she exclaimed. And then: "But the hunger you confessed?"

"Of the soul, mademoiselle," said the poet; "the most bitter!"

"And you have no difficulties with the laundress?"

"None at all," he groaned. "But in the bright days of poverty that have fled for ever, I have had many difficulties with her. This morning I reconstituted the situation—I have imagined myself without a sou, and without a collar."

"The little restaurant," she questioned, "where I saw you dining on the odour?"

"I figured fondly to myself that I was ravenous, and that I dared not enter. It was ecstatic."

"The Mont de Piété?"

"There imagination restored to me the vanished moments when I have mounted with suspense, and my least deplorable suit of clothes." His emotion was profound. "It is my youth to which I am bidding adieu!" he cried. "It is more than that—it is my aspirations and renown!"

"But you have said that you have no renown," she reminded him.

"So much the more painful," said the young man; "the hussy we could not win is always the fairest—I part from renown even more despairingly than from youth."

She felt an amusement, an interest. But soon it was the turn of him to feel an interest—the interest that had consequences so important, so 'eartbreaking, so fatales! He had demanded of her, most naturally, her history, and this she related to him in a style dramatic. Myself, I have not the style dramatic, though I avow to you I have for it an admiration.

"We are in a provincial town," she has said to the young man, "we are in Rouen—the workroom of a modiste. Have no embarrassment, Monsieur Tricotrin; you, at least, are invisible to the girls who sew! They sew all day, and talk little—already they are tristes, resigned. Among them sits one different—one passionate, ambitious—a girl who burns to be divette, singer, who is devoured by longings for applause, fashion, wealth. She has made the acquaintance of a little tradesman who bakes pastry. He has become fascinated, they are affianced. In a month she will be married."

The young man, Tricotrin, well understood that the girl she described was herself.

"What does she consider while she sits sewing?" she continued. "That the pastrycook loves her, that he is generous, that she will do her most to be to him a good wife? Not at all. Far from that! She considers, on the contrary, that she was a fool to promise him; she considers how she shall escape—from him, from Rouen, from her ennui—she seeks to fly to Paris. Alas! she has no money, not a franc. And

she sews—always she sews in the dull room—and her mind rebels."

"Good!" said the poet. "It is a capital first instalment!"

"The time goes on. In remains only a week for the marriage morning. The little home is prepared, the little pastrycook is full of joy. Alors, there is an evening they go out; for her the sole attraction in the town is the hall of varieties. Yes, it is third class, it is not great things; however, it is the only one in Rouen. He purchases two tickets. What a misfortune; it is the last temptation to her! They stroll back; she takes his arm—under the moon, under the stars—but she sees only the lamps of Paris! She sees only that he can say nothing she cares to hear!"

"Ah, unhappy man!" murmured the poet.

"They sit at a café table, and he talks, the fiancé, of the bliss that is to come to them. She attends to not a word, not a syllable. While she smiles, she questions (frenzied) how she can escape. She has commanded a sirop. As she lifts her glass to the siphon, her gaze falls on the ring she wears—the ring of their betrothal. 'To the future, cher ange!' says the fiancé. 'To the future, vieux chéri!' she says. And she laughs in her heart—for she resolves to sell the ring!"

Tricotrin had become absolutely enthralled.

"She obtained for the ring forty-five francs the next day—and for the little pastrycook all is finished. She wrote him a letter—'Good-bye.' He has lost his reason. Mad with despair, he has flung himself before an electric car, and is killed. . . . It is strange," she

added to the poet, who regarded her with consternation, "that I did not think sooner of the ring that was always on my finger, n'est-ce-pas? It may be that never before had I felt so furious an impulse to desert him. It may be also—that there was no ring and no pastrycook!" And she broke into peals of laughter.

"O mon Dieu!" exclaimed the young man, "but you are enchanting! Let us go to breakfast—you are the kindred soul I have looked for all my life. By the bye, I may as well know your name?"

Then, monsieur, this poor girl who had trembled before her laundress, she told him a name which was in a while to crowd the Ambassadeurs, and be famous through all Paris—a name which was to mean caprices, folly, extravagance the most wilful and reckless. She answered—and it said nothing yet—"My name is Paulette Fleury."

The piano-organ stopped short, as if it knew the Frenchman had reached a crisis in his narrative. He folded his arms and nodded impressively.

"Voilà! Monsieur, I 'ave introduced you to Paulette Fleury! It was her beginning."

He offered me a cigarette, and frowned, lost in thought, at the lady who was chopping bread behind the counter.

"Listen," he resumed.

They have breakfasted; they have fed the sparrows around their chairs, and they have strolled under the green trees in the sunshine. She was singing then at a little café concert the most obscure. It is arranged,

before they part, that in the evening he shall go to applaud her.

He had a friend, also young, a composer, named Nicolas Pitou. I cannot express to you the devotion that existed between them. Pitou was employed at a publisher's, but the publisher has not paid him much better than his art. The comrades have shared everything: the loans from the Mont de Piété, the attic, and the dreams. In Montmarte it was said "Tricotrin and Pitou" as one says "Orestes and Pylades." It is beautiful, such affection, hein? Listen!

Tricotrin has recounted to his friend his meeting with Paulette, and when the hour for the concert is arrived, Pitou has accompanied him. The musician, however, was, perhaps, the more sedate. He has gone with little expectation; his interest was not high.

What a surprise he has had! He has found her an actress—an artist to the tips of the fingers. Tricotrin also was astonished. The two friends, the poet and composer, said "Mon Dieu!" They regarded the one the other. They said "Mon Dieu!" again. Soon Pitou had requested of Tricotrin an introduction. It is agreed. Tricotrin has presented his friend, and invited the chanteuse to drink a bock—a glass of beer. . . . Apropos, you take a liqueur, monsieur, yes? What liqueur you take? Sst, garçon! . . . Well, you conjecture, no doubt, what I shall say? Before the bock was finished, they were in love with her—both!

At the door of her lodging, Paulette has given to each a pressure of the hand, and said gently, "Till to-morrow."

"I worship her!" Tricotrin has told Pitou.

"I have found my Ideal!" Pitou has answered Tricotrin.

It is sublime, such friendship, hein?

In the mind of the poet who had accomplished tragedies majestic—in the mind of the composer, the most classical in Montmartre—there had been born a new ambition: it was to write a comic song for Paulette Fleury!

It appears to you droll, perhaps? Monsieur, to her lover, the humblest divette is more than Patti. In all the world there can be no joy so thrilling as to hear the music of one's brain sung by the woman one adores—unless it be to hear one's verse recited by the lips one loves. I believe it has been accepted as a fact, this; nevertheless it is true.

Yes, already the intention has come to them, and Paulette was well pleased when they told her of it. Oh, she knew they loved her, both, and with both she coquetted. But with their intention she did not coquet; as to that she was in earnest. Every day they discussed it with enthusiasm—they were to write a song that should make for her a furore.

What happened? I shall tell you. On Monday, when Tricotrin was to depart for Lyons, he has informed his uncle that he will not go. No less than that! His uncle was furious—I do not blame him—but naturally Tricotrin has argued "If I am to create for Paulette her great chance, I must remain in Paris to study Paulette! I cannot create in an atmosphere of commerce. I require the Montmartrois, the Boulevards, the inspiration of her presence?" Isn't it?

And Pitou—whose very soul had been enraptured in

his leisure by a fugue he was composing—Pitou would have no more of it. He allowed the fugue to grow dusty, while day and night he thought always of refrains that ran "Ohé, la la la!" Constantly they conferred, the comrades. They told the one the other how they loved her; and then they beat their heads, and besought of Providence a fine idea for the comic song.

It was their thought supreme. The silk manufacturer has washed his 'ands of Tricotrin, but he has not cared—there remained to him still one of the bank-notes. As for Pitou, who neglected everything except to find his melody for Paulette, the publisher has given him the sack. Their acquaintances have ridiculed the sacrifices made for her. But, monsieur, when a man truly loves, to make a sacrifice for the woman is to make a present to himself.

Nevertheless, I avow to you that they have fretted because of her coquetry. In one hour it has seemed that Pitou had gained her heart; in the next her encouragement has been all to Tricotrin. Sometimes they have said to her:

"Paulette, it is true we are as Orestes and Pylades, but there can be only one King of Eden at the time. Is it Orestes or Pylades that you mean to crown?"

Then she would laugh and reply:

"How can I say? I like you both so much I can never make up my mind which to like best."

It was not satisfactory.

And always she added, "In the meantime, where is the song?"

Ah, the song, that song, how they have sought it!—in the Bois, and in the Halles, and in the slums. Often

they have tramped Paris till daybreak in meditating the great chance for Paulette. And at last the poet has discovered it: for each verse a different phase of life, but through it all, the pursuit of gaiety, the fever of the dance—the gaiety of youth, the gaiety of dotage, the gaiety of despair! It should be the song of the pleasure-seekers—the voices of Paris when the lamps are lit.

Monsieur, if we sat 'ere in the restaurant until it closed I could not describe to you how passionately Tricotrin, the devoted Tricotrin, did work for her. He has studied her without cessation; he has studied her attitudes, her expressions. He has taken his lyric as if it were material and cut it to her figure; he has taken it as if it were plaster, and moulded it upon her mannerisms. There was not a moue she made, not a pretty trick she had, not a word she liked to sing for which he did not provide an opportunity. At the last line, when the pen fell from his fingers, he shouted to Pitou, "Comrade, be brave—I have won her!"

And Pitou? Monsieur, if we sat 'ere till they prepared the tables for déjeuner to-morrow, I could not describe to you how passionately Pitou, the devoted Pitou, did work that she might have a grand popularity by his music. At dawn, when he has found that strepitoso passage, which is the hurrying of the feet, he wakened the poet to cry, "Mon ami, I pity you—she is mine!" It was the souls of two men when it was finished, that comic song they made for her! It was the song the organ has ground out—"Partant pour le Moulin."

And then they rehearsed it, the three of them, over and over, inventing always new effects. And then the

night for the song is arrived. It has rained all day, and they have walked together in the rain—the singer, and the men who loved her, both—to the little café concert where she would appear.

They trembled in the room, among the crowd, Pitou and Tricotrin; they are agitated. There are others who sing—it says nothing to them. In the room, in the Future, there is only Paulette!

It is very hot in the café concert, and there is too much noise! At last they ask her: "Is she nervous?" She shakes her head: "Mais non!" She smiles to them.

Attend! It is her turn. Ouf; but it is hot in the café concert, and there is too much noise! She mounts the platform. The audience are careless; it goes on, the jingle of the glasses, the hum of talk. She begins. Beneath the table Tricotrin has gripped the hand of Pitou.

Wait! Regard the crowd that look at her! The glasses are silent, hein? The talk has stopped. To a great actress is come her chance. There is *not* too much noise in the café concert

But, when she finished! What an uproar! Never will she forget it. A thousand times she has told the story, how it was written—the song—and how it made her famous. Before two weeks she was the attraction of the Ambassadeurs, and all Paris has raved of Paulette Fleury.

Tricotrin and Pitou were mad with joy. Certainly Paris did not rave of Pitou or Tricotrin; there have not been many that remembered who wrote the song; also it earned no money for them, because it was hers—the

gift of their love. Still, they were enraptured. To both of them she owed equally, and more than ever it was a question which would be the happy man.

Listen! When they have gone to call on her one afternoon she was not at 'ome. What had happened? I shall tell you. There was a noodle, rich—what you call a "Johnnie in the Stalls"—who became infatuated with her at the Ambassadeurs. He whistled "Partant pour le Moulin" all the days and went to hear it all the nights. Well, she was not at 'ome because she had married him. Absolutely they were married! Her lovers have been told it at the door.

What a moment! Figure yourself what they have suffered—both! They had worshipped her; they had made sacrifices for her; they had created for her her grand success; and, as a consequence of that song, she was the wife of the "Johnnie in the Stalls"!

Far down the street, but yet distinct, the organ revived the tune again. My Frenchman shuddered, and got up.

"I cannot bear it," he murmured. "You understand? The associations are too pathetic."

"They must be harrowing," I said. "Before you go, there is one thing I should like to ask you, if I may. Have I had the honour of meeting Monsieur Tricotrin or Monsieur Pitou?"

He stroked his hat, and gazed at me in sad surprise. "Oh, but neither, monsieur," he groaned. "The associations are much more 'arrowing than that—I was the 'Johnnie in the Stalls'!"

II

A VERY GOOD THING FOR THE GIRL

BAGOT told us this tale in the Stage Door Club one night. We were sitting round the fire, talking of perfect love, and somebody asked him if he had ever thought of marrying.

"Once," said the comedian cheerfully.

"Couldn't you afford it?" His talent and the remains of his good looks were worth fifty pounds a week to him then, but there had been days—well, listen to Bagot!

"It wasn't that I couldn't afford it," he said with a laugh; "actors never wait till they can afford it. I escaped in a curious way. What saved me was being such an artist. Fact! I was really smitten. If I hadn't been an artist in spite of myself I should be shivering in the last train home to Bedford Park now, instead of talking to you dear boys in an arm-chair, with a glass at my side. What? Oh, I'll tell you about it with pleasure.

"Of course, you know I made my name as the 'Rev. Simon Tibbits' in poor Pulteney's *Touch and Go*. Some things a man doesn't forget, and I remember how

I felt when I settled for the part better than I remember yesterday. You see it was my first London engagement, and I had been trying to get one in London for sixteen years. Sixteen years I had been "on the road,"—and seen the amateurs with money sauntering on to the West-End stage from their 'Varsity Club.

"My agent had told me to try my luck at the office over the theatre one morning in July, and when I went in, there was nobody there but a young man who I guessed must be Pulteney. He was sitting at the table with a pencil in his hand, fiddling with a cardboard model of one of the scenes, and looking as worried as if he had been Chancellor of the Exchequer.

"'Have I the honour of speaking to Mr. Pulteney?' said I. In those days I imagined authors were important persons.

"He flushed, and smiled—rather on the wrong side of his mouth, I thought. 'That's my name.'

"'I was sent round to see you about the part of the clergyman in your farcical comedy, Mr. Pulteney,' I said. I had really been sent to see the stage-manager, but soft soap is never wasted, and I was always a bit of a diplomatist.

"He asked me to sit down, and we talked. He was smoking a cigarette, and I thought for a moment he was going to offer me one. I suppose it occurred to him that it wouldn't be the right thing to ask an actor to smoke in the manager's room, for he threw his own cigarette away. He was a gentleman, poor Pulteney, though he was a deuced bad dramatist.

"The manager came bustling back soon, and began to hum and haw, but Pulteney put in a word that made

it all right. I was told it was a capital part, and a big chance for me, and I skipped downstairs and out into the street, feeling as puffed-up as if I owned the Strand. As a matter of fact, the salary wasn't much—I had had better money in the provinces—but the thought of making a hit in the West End so excited me that I was nearly popping with pride.

"Great Cumberland Place! wasn't I sold when the part came. You've no idea how duffing it really was. I don't mind saying that a good many jolly fine comedians would never have got a laugh in it. When I read the jokes I could have cried. It wasn't funny as the author wrote it, dear boys, believe *me*. I don't want to brag of what I've done—I'm not a man who 'gases' about himself—but it was the 'character' *I put into it* that made that part!

"Well, the rehearsals weren't beginning for three weeks, and I kept hoping I'd see how to do something with it before the first 'call.' I spoke the lines one way, and I spoke the lines another way, and the more I studied the glummer I felt. I had my dinner at Exeter Hall several times, and listened to the people giving their orders; it was cheap, and I thought I might hear the sort of tone I was trying to get hold of. But I didn't. On the Sunday I went to three churches, and sat through three sermons. Honest Injun! And that was no use. Talk about an R.A.'s difficulty in finding the right model! I spent eight dusty days scouring London for a model for the 'Rev. Simon Tibbits'!

"Then one afternoon I had come out of 'Prossers' Avenue.' As it happened I wasn't thinking 'shop'; I wasn't thinking about anything in particular; and

all of a sudden I heard a voice. *A* voice? I heard *the* voice. I heard the voice I needed for the part!

"I jumped. My heart was in my throat. There, smiling up at a six-foot constable, was a little parson asking the way to Baker Street. He looked like an elderly cherub, with his pink cheeks, and his innocent, inquiring eyes. I held my breath in the hope he would go on talking, but the policeman had answered him, and he tripped along with merely a 'Thank you.' He tripped along with the oddest walk I have ever seen, and I dodged after him, never taking my gaze off his legs, and studying them all the way to Charing Cross.

"As I expected, he was going by 'bus. There was one just moving. Up went his umbrella, and the next moment I was on the step too, intending to lure him into conversation as soon as I could, and master his voice as nicely as I was mastering his legs.

"'Full inside,' said the conductor, putting his dirty hand before my face. I was so annoyed I could have punched his head!

"Well, there was nothing for it but to go on top, and wait for some one to get out. Hang it, nobody did get out, and I saw no more of my little model till we reached Baker Street. I meant to let him walk a few yards, and then ask him to direct me to Lord's, but there was a surprise for me; he tripped across the road into the station. 'Oho,' I said to myself, 'training it! So much the better. We're going to have a comfortable chat together, after all, you and I!'

"I kept as close to him when he took his ticket as if I'd designs on his watch, and I heard him say, 'Third class to Rickmansworth, if you please.' This was rather

awkward—I didn't want to pay a long fare, and I didn't know the line well; *I* had to book as far as Rickmansworth too. When we got round to the platform the train was there, and he hovered up and down for five minutes or more, looking for a seat to suit him; I began to think we'd both be left behind. Then just as they were slamming the doors, he made up his mind. In he went, and I after him, and—what do you think? We were both on the same side of the compartment, with a fat woman and a soldier between us!

"Two passengers between us, I give you my word, and no room opposite. Not only I couldn't talk to him—I couldn't even see him. Every time we drew into a station I prayed the compartment would thin a bit; I sat tense, watching the faces. Not a sign on them! You've heard of the American rustic who got so exasperated standing up in a crowded car, that at last he shouted, 'Say! ain't none o' you people got homes?' That was how *I* felt."

Bagot's imitation of the rustic was very good, and we signified our appreciation in the usual way. When the laugh was over, some one told the waiter we were thirsty, and the story-teller filled his pipe.

"Well," he resumed, puffing, "to cut a long journey short, we reached Rickmansworth without my having had a glimpse of my gentleman. I was about desperate now. He hadn't taken a dozen steps when I overtook him, and asked if he would be kind enough to inform me whether any decent apartments were to be had in the village. It didn't seem worth while to have had all this bother just to hear him speak again for ten seconds, and I was wishing myself back in my apartments in

Kennington. I said the first thing that came into my head.

"It turned out to be the best question I could have put.

"'I am a visitor myself,' he said, beaming at me, 'but I believe there are rooms to be had in Cornstalk Terrace. Yes, I am almost positive I noticed a card in a window as I passed through this morning.'

"I stood simply lapping his voice up.

"'Is it difficult for a stranger to find?' I asked.

"'No, indeed,' he said, 'it is quite near. But I am going there; if you care to accompany me——'

"'Oh, you're too good!' I exclaimed, and upon my word I could have hugged him!

"The road was a great deal nearer than I wanted it to be, for he was chirruping to me beautifully, and I hated to part from him. When we arrived I effervesced with gratitude, and he hoped I'd find comfortable quarters; and then I went straight back to the station—and heard I had just missed a train! Pleasant? Rickmansworth isn't the sprightliest place I've ever waited in either. I had some nourishment in the bar of the hotel across the way, and I examined the High Street. It wasn't extensive. The barmaid had told me there was a park, so I started to discover it. I wasn't keen on the park, you understand, but I thought it would be a nice quiet spot to rehearse in and see if I had caught the little cleric's voice. As I was going along, past a row of villas, blest if I didn't come across him again, standing at his gate!

"He supposed I had been hunting for lodgings all the time, so, of course, I had to keep the game up. He

was a friendly old chap, and, honour bright, I felt sorry to think I was going to turn him into ridicule on the stage. Still he would never know, and actors can't be choosers. He went inside to ask his landlady if she could recommend any diggings to me, and a minute afterwards out he fluttered to say he had quite forgotten there would be a couple of rooms vacant in that very house next day. Scott! I had had no more idea of taking rooms than I had of taking the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, but it was too gigantic a chance to miss. I fixed the matter with the old woman there and then—and the next morning my model and I were living under the same roof! . . . Pass the matches, one of you fellows, my pipe is out. . . .

"At the back of the house there were some lettuces and a clothes-prop that were called a "garden." My parlour was at the back, too; and after dinner I saw the rector airing himself. By now I had learned he was a rector. I lost no time in joining him, you may be sure —I wasn't paying two rents to go to sleep on the sofa —and we discussed politics and public libraries. It was a bit heavy for me, but I didn't worry much what he talked about so long as I could hear his dulcet tones. I ought to have said there was a bench against the clothes-prop; so far as her means permitted, the old woman did things handsomely.

"There was a bench, and we sat down on it; and while we were sitting there the door opened—and out into the sunshine there came a young and beautiful girl. She wore a white cotton frock, and there was no paint or powder on her face, and she had the kind of eyes that make you want to say your prayers and be good.

I'm not going to gush—I'm holding myself in—but on my honour she was just the saintliest picture of English maidenhood ever seen in a poet's dream!

"'My daughter,' said my model.

"I was so staggered that I bowed like a super at a bob a night.

"Yes, the old woman did things handsomely—there was room for three on the bench. She sat by me, turning a backyard into paradise—I mean the girl, not the old woman—and I forgot to study her father for half an hour. I heard where his living was, and why they were taking a holiday, and I stammered that I was an actor, and was afraid they'd be shocked. I was stupid to own it, though it was all right and they didn't mind; but there was something in that girl's eyes that forced the truth from you in spite of yourself. I had been going to say I was in the city, but the lie stuck.

"There's some fine country round Rickmansworth—'Ricky,' the natives call it—and we used to explore, the three of us. We'd go to Chorley Wood, and to Chenies—what a good 'back cloth' Chenies would make! By the end of the week we were together nearly all the day. They invited me into their room to supper, and after supper Marion would sing at a decrepit piano. The meals were quite plain, you know—sometimes we'd pick the green stuff in the garden ourselves—but, boys, the peace of that little village room in the lamplight! The minister and his child—the simple, God-fearing man, and that girl with her deep, grave eyes, and earnest voice. Their devotion to each other, the homeliness of it all! To me, a touring player, it was sweet, it was wonderful, to be welcomed in an atmosphere of home.

"If the comedy had been put into rehearsal on the date arranged it would have been better for me. But it wasn't—the rehearsals were postponed—and soon I was thinking much more of Marion than of my part. I used to talk to her of—well, of things I had never talked of to any one except my mother when I was a kid. Somehow I didn't feel ashamed to talk of them to that girl. She took me out of myself. She raised me up. The footlights were forgotten.

"Oh, I had no right to think of her in the way I did, of course! What could I hope for? There was a world between us, and I saw it. I told myself I had done all I came to do; and that I ought to go back to town at once; I told myself I was mad to stay there. But I knew I loved her. I loved her as I have never loved a woman since—and there were moments when I thought that *she* was fond of *me*."

Bagot, it was rapidly becoming evident to us, had forgotten that he prefaced the story by congratulating himself on not having married the girl. His voice trembled. We saw that, carried away by his own intensity as a narrator, he was beginning to believe he was a blighted being. But we looked sympathetic, and let him "work it up."

"One day she owned she cared for me," he continued, with a far-away air. "It was the day before they were going home, and we were talking of our 'friendship.' Somehow I—I lost my head, and she was crying in my arms.

"I asked her to marry me. I swore she should never repent it. She sat listening to me with her hands limp in her lap, and a look on her face that I shall see till I die.

She was afraid—not of me, but that her father wouldn't consent. They had no violent prejudice against the theatre, but she had never been to one in her life; for her to marry an actor seemed an impossible thing.

"I went to him right off. I told him I worshipped her; I implored him to trust her to me. It was an awful shock to him; I don't believe he had had a suspicion of the state of affairs—he reproached himself for letting it come about. But he was very gentle. He said he had hoped for a far different future for her, still that all he wanted was for his child to be happy; he said he couldn't stand in her way if he knew she was really sure of herself. In the end he promised she should marry me if she wanted to in three years' time.

"When I parted from her we considered we were engaged; and in the evening, after they left, I went to town.

"I went to town, and there was a 'call' for the first rehearsal of *Touch and Go*. I had forgotten business, I had forgotten everything but Marion. That 'call' paralysed me. I saw what I had done, I realised the situation. The girl I was to marry reverenced her father—and I meant to burlesque him on the stage!

"I couldn't do it, I wouldn't! How could I think of it now? It wasn't that I feared their finding it out—as I tell you, they weren't playgoers, and their home was a good way off besides—it was the heartlessness of the thing that frightened me. To 'make myself up' as *her* father? To speak the bland, hypocritical lines of the part in her father's voice, to mimic

him, to turn him into ridicule to amuse a crowd. I say, how could I do it?

"All the same it was precious difficult to avoid, for I had studied him so long. But I went to the show the first day and rehearsed as I had expected to rehearse before I met him. Perhaps not so well; it was a strain *not* to be like him after all my study, and it made me tame and stiff. I rehearsed so the first day, and for three or four days, and presently I began to notice that the Management was a bit unhappy, and that Pulteney nearly twisted his moustache out during my scenes. If an author has written a bad part, trust him to blame the actor! He buttonholed me at last, and begged me 'to put a little more "character" into it.' And I tried to; but I knew it was a failure, for I could only see one 'character' all the time—and that one I wouldn't touch.

"When I was in the stalls once, he and the manager sat down and put their heads together. It was dark in front, and they hadn't seen me as they came round. I heard them say something about 'A pity they hadn't a West-End actor for the part.' I knew they were talking of *my* part, and it got my dander up; I knew I could act any of that West-End hoity-toity Company off the stage; I knew I had only to 'let myself go.'

"When I went 'on' again I determined I'd show 'em what I could do; I determined I'd show 'em they had a better comedian than any forty-pound-a-weeker. I sent them into fits; 'Hallo!' they said. The women in the wings stopped talking about their dresses to watch me. The highly-connected amateurs from Ox-

ford and Cambridge began to give at the knees, and I could hear the leading-man's heart drop on to the boards; the actor from the provinces was wiping them out! That rehearsal was the sweetest triumph of my life.

"She'd never know—she'd never know! I kept telling myself she couldn't hear of it. By the time the wig that I ordered was tried on I felt as sure of success as I was of my lines. I was soaked in the part. I wasn't *acting* the little rector—by George, I *was* the little rector, trip, face, and chirrup. And the first night came, and I was to play in London at last!

"They told me the house was crammed. All the swell critics were there, all the fashionable first-nighters. I was so nervous that the wig-paste shook in my hands when I 'made up,' but I was ready much too soon.

"I went downstairs and waited. The doorkeeper gave me a note. Of all the——! It was from Marion. A friend had brought her up to see me, and she was in the theatre. I was stunned, I thought I was going to fall. *You* know—every man in this room knows—that for an actor to remodel his performance at the last minute would be a miracle. I couldn't do it, it wasn't in my power, but even then I thought I'd try! I said I *must* try, though it would ruin me! And I heard my cue.

"My first lines 'went' for nothing. I floundered—the audience were ice; I saw the people on the stage looking at me aghast. Then suddenly I got a laugh: a gesture, an intonation, something I had

been trying to hold back, had escaped me. The laugh went to my head—I made them laugh again! I said I'd explain to Marion—that she'd understand, that she'd forgive me—and even while I said it, my other self, the 'self' that wasn't acting, knew it was a lie and I was losing her.

"I couldn't help it—the laughter made me drunk; I did it all! I knew the disgust she must be feeling, but the audience were roaring at me now; I felt the shame that she was suffering with my own heart, but the artist in me swept me on. The manager panted at me in the wings: 'You're great—you're immense. Gad! you're making the hit of the piece!' The stalls were in convulsions, the gallery had got my name. '*Bagot!*' they were shouting—after each act, '*Bagot!*' Pulteney rushed to me with blessings at the end. The house thundered for me. It was London! I knew that I was 'made'! But across the flare of grinning faces I seemed to see the Angel I had lost, and the horror in her eyes."

Bagot bowed his head; his pipe had fallen, tears dripped down his cheeks. By this time he was quite sure he had been mourning for her ever since beside a lonely hearth.

"She wrote to me next day, breaking it off," he groaned. "She wouldn't listen to reason; she said 'it might be art, but it wasn't love.'"

"Did you ever see her afterwards?" we asked.

"Once," he said, "years later. She married some county chap, with an estate and all that. I saw her driving with her little boy. She looked very happy, I thought. Women soon forget." After a pause he

added bitterly: "If one of you fellows"—he glanced at the only author in the group—"cares to write the true tragedy of a man's life, there it is. You might call it the 'Price of Success.'"

But we all thought a more appropriate title would be the one that I have used.

III

THE WOMAN WHO WISHED TO DIE

My meeting with Mr. Peters was so momentous that I can't resist mentioning it was due to some one I had never seen—to a trifle; I can't resist referring to my own affairs for a moment. I was supposed to be at work on a novel, and I had a mind as infertile as mashed potato. One day in August I tumbled a receipt out of a desk, and saw that the lady to whom I sent my stories to be typewritten had had nothing from me to typewrite for two months. The discovery dismayed me. I was ashamed to realise how slowly I was getting on, and resolved to try a change of surroundings. My trip altered the course of lives—and I shouldn't have made it but for the reproach of a stranger's receipt.

I decided upon Ostend, by way of Antwerp, where I wanted to see the pictures; also I meant to visit Brussels, where I wanted to see my prettiest cousin. And in Antwerp—behold Mr. Peters! As I was wandering through the gallery an American asked me if I could tell him in which of the rooms he would

find "The Last Communion of St. Francis of Assisi." Having just been directed to it myself—just been startled by the faultless fluency of an official's English—I had the information pat, and the American and I proceeded to the room together.

I remember feeling it incumbent on me to be pained by the first words he spoke in front of the picture.

"I am told," he remarked, "that Rubens sold this work for sixty pounds, English money, and that forty thousand pounds were subsequently paid for it. Rough on Rubens!"

I affected the tone of the Superior Person. "You would see it better if you stood farther away," I said; "what do you think of the painting?"

"Of the painting," he answered, "I am no judge, but the way the value of that property has risen just astonishes me."

I did not think I should like him, but I began to like him surprisingly soon. He was a sad-faced, middle-aged man, with a simple manner that was wonderfully winning. In less than five minutes I was humiliated that I had sneered at him in front of "St. Francis of Assisi." By what right, how much did I understand of it myself? My attitude had been nine-tenths pose. This man was genuine; he spoke of what he found interesting. And he proved anything but a fool.

We went down the steps of the Musée des Beaux Arts side by side, and strolled through the hot streets, among the swarm of ragged Flemish children—there are more ragged children to the square yard in Antwerp than in Westbourne Park—to the quarter of the

hotels. It turned out that we were staying at the same one, he on the first floor and I on the fifth, and after dinner we drifted together to the Place Verte, and talked there under the trees while the band played.

He told me that he had not been to Europe before, and I discerned that he was a lonely man persevering with the effort to enjoy himself.

"The fact is," he said, handing me his cigar-case, "I ought to have made the trip some years ago.—Won't you try a cigar, sir?—There's nothing the matter with Europe, but I guess I'm not quite so keen on sight-seeing as I was. When I was a lad I was dead-stuck on coming over, but I hadn't the dollars then. I promised myself to have a good time when I was thirty, and I hustled. When I was thirty I had made a few dollars, but I saw no chance of the good time—I was still hustling. One afternoon it occurred to me that I was forty. It displeased me *some;* seemed to me that good time was never coming. At the start I had aimed to be the boss of a business, but now the business had got so big it was bossing me. 'Well,' I said, 'you have made your pile, and you have nobody to spend it but yourself; next year you shall quit, and have that good time you have been working for so long.' But it didn't come off. The business went on swelling, and I went on saying, 'Next year.' And before I knew where I was I was fifty, and"—his voice dropped a little—"and I have never had the good time yet."

He was leaving for Ostend the next morning, and, when we parted, I was sorry he wasn't to remain in

Antwerp till the end of the week like myself. However, in Ostend I expected we should meet again, for I did not mean to stay long in Brussels. It is a beautiful city, and many of us would admire it much more if it did not set us yearning for Paris. The resemblance is striking, but the fascination is absent. To go to Brussels is like calling on the sister of the woman one is in love with. Brussels is Paris provincialised; one realises it before one has sat outside a café for an hour and watched the types go by. Literally it is provincialised in August, when most of the theatres are closed, and the streets are peopled by excursionists. I had intended to stay three or four days at most, but duty to my relatives kept me with them for ten or twelve, and at last when I did reach Ostend I had almost forgotten Mr. Peters.

The thought of him recurred to me as I made my way towards the Kursaal on the first evening, and I wondered if he was still here. It was eight o'clock, and now that the glare of sun upon the blistered *Plage* had faded, and the radiance of electricity had risen in its stead, the town was looking its best. Ostend was still dining. The long continuous line of hotel windows fronting the sea was brilliant. Window after window, wide, curtainless, and open to the view. A frontage of gleaming tables and coloured candle-shades — a dazzling frontage of flowers, and faces, and women's jewelled necks and arms.

In the Kursaal the orchestra was playing "L'Amico Fritz." I had listened to the music for perhaps half an hour when I saw Mr. Peters. He was with a friend, and he passed without observing me. They

sat down a short distance off, and I noticed that he was talking with much animation to her, with much more animation than he had shown with me. Indeed, I think that was what I noticed first of all — the unexpected animation of Mr. Peters.

But the next instant I was engrossed by his companion. She was not youthful; I didn't consider her pretty; her dress, rich as it was, appeared to me a dowdy sort of thing among the elaborate costumes around us. Then what engrossed me? Well, it was the expression that she wore. I am trying to find the word. "Pleasure," of course—but that says nothing. As nearly as I can explain, it was the wonder in her look. The 'wonder,' that is it! There were crow's-feet about her eyes, and her gaze shone with a young girl's wonder.

Evidently the interest in the conversation was mutual, and I assumed that they had known each other in the States. Then a second time they passed me, and I heard her speak, and she had no trace of the American accent. It began to seem to me that Mr. Peters had been making very good use of his time in Ostend.

I saw him with her again on the morrow, and on the next day, but two or three days went by before I saw him alone. When we did have a chat, I couldn't withstand the temptation to allude to her.

"You're in better spirits," I said; "have you come across anybody from the 'other side' to cheer you up?"

A suspicion of a smile flickered across his thin, shrewd lips.

"No," he drawled; "no, I have met no acquaint-

ances in Europe yet, but——" He handed his cigar case to me: "Won't you try a cigar, sir?—but I am getting along."

I used to wish he would present me to her, but he never did. Constantly those two figures sat together in the Kursaal. In the concert-room or on the terrace, if I found the little woman I found Mr. Peters. Never to my knowledge did she speak to anybody else. And always the girlishness of her gaze held and mystified me—always, that is to say, until the end was approaching.

Of course, I didn't know that it threatened the end then, but I couldn't fail to perceive the difference. The curiosity she had inspired in me was so strong, I had watched her so intently for nearly a fortnight —oh, it may sound vulgar; I don't defend myself— that the first time I glanced across at her face and saw trouble there, I was sensible of a distinct shock. And in the next few days I said it was heavy trouble. It was as if the blaze within her were dwindling, as if it were dying out, and leaving her cold and grey. I said—it is a great word, but once I said the look on her face was "terror."

I did not attach any importance to the fact that Mr. Peters was sitting alone on the terrace when I went to the Kursaal that evening, because I supposed that he was waiting there for her to come in; it was when I found him alone in the same place much later that I was surprised. You know how you understand sometimes, without a gesture, that a man wants you to sit down by him, but doesn't want you to speak; I knew that Mr. Peters wanted me to sit

down by him, and didn't want me to speak. I think we must have sat looking at the track of moonlight on the sea for a quarter of an hour before either of us said a word.

Then he remarked drily, "My friend has gone."

"You must miss her," I responded.

He mused again, and handed his cigar case to me with his usual question. I said I would have a cigarette.

"You found me dumfounded," he resumed, puffing his cigar deliberately, "by the most singular occurrence I have heard of in my life; I am beginning to get my breath back. You may have noticed the lady?"

I said that I had.

"I guess that you assume her to be a wealthy woman?"

I said that I did.

"Well, sir, she is about as poor as they make them. I have lived too long to be extravagant with emotions, but that little lady's history has just broken me up. As a writer you may find it worth your attention. It was because she had always been solitary; that was what started the trouble — her loneliness. It's an awful thing to conjecture how many poor little women in London are breaking their hearts with loneliness. Never a companion she had, never a pleasure. Mornings she walked to her employment; evenings she walked back to where she lodged. She was a girl of eighteen then, and she walked cheerfully. And she was cheerful when she was twenty, and twenty-five, and thirty — always keeping her pluck up with the

thought of something brighter ahead, you know; always hoping, like me, for that 'good time.'"

"Go on," I said.

"When she had been clerking years, and doing home work in her leisure, she had put a small sum by. But she was frightened to touch it—there was the growing fear of the lonely woman that one day she might take sick and need that money. And the 'good time' didn't come. And her youth went out of her, and lines began to creep about her eyes and mouth—she looked in the glass and saw them—and she didn't walk to and fro quite so bravely now. Twenty years odd she had had of drudgery, and the hopefulness was dying in her. She was just faint with longing, sir. She wanted to put on pretty things before she was old—she was starving for a taste of the sweets that she was meant for."

He blew a circlet of smoke into the air, and watched it.

"That stage passed. Seemed to the woman, as time dragged on, that she hadn't the energy left to long for anything. She was tired. When she lay down to sleep she wasn't particularly keen on waking up any more. As I see the matter, it was by no means the work that had done the damage—it was the dullness. It was the emptiness of her life, the forlornness of it. By and by she had to go to a doctor, and he talked about 'depression' and 'melancholia.' He said what she ought to do was to live with friends—she was about as friendless as Robinson Crusoe before Friday turned up—he recommended her to seek 'gay society'! She said she was 'much

obliged,' and went back to her lodging, and sat staring from the window at the strangers passing in the twilight. I don't know whether you have struck a case of melancholia? A man I was fond of was taken that way in Buffalo. Out of business he would sit brooding by the hour, with his eyes wide, and never saying a word. I stayed talking to him once half the night, persuading him to put a change of linen in his grip, and start for Europe in the morning; I told him it would do him good to hustle round the stores, buying most things he needed to put on, after he arrived. I guess my arguments weren't so excellent as my intentions—when I went down town after breakfast I heard he had shot himself. Melancholia's likely to be serious. . . . No, the doctor's advice wasn't much use to the little woman. Her walk to the office lay across some bridge. One evening, as she was crossing it, the thought came that it would be sweet if she were lying in the river and heard the water singing in her ears. Then she tore herself away because she had turned giddy. Every morning and evening she had to cross that bridge, you understand me. Every morning and evening that thought hammered in her, and she stopped by the parapet and looked down."

In the pause he made, the music from the concert-room was painfully distinct. They were playing the "Invitation to the Valse."

"Well, just as with the friend I lost in Buffalo," he went on quietly, "while she did her work like a machine all day, she was proposing to die. She had grown so woful tired that it was a relief to her to think of dying.

. . . You will smile at what I am going to say. One afternoon she saw an ordinary picture advertisement stuck on a wall—a picture of a Continental resort, with fashionable ladies parading on the *Plage*. She told me that—with the thought of death great in her mind—she stood right there in the London street, looking at it; and, sir, her regret was that she was going out of the world without once having worn a pretty frock, or bought a handful of roses in December! You may laugh at the idea of a commonplace poster influencing a woman at such a time?"

"I am not laughing," I said.

"She harped on that grievance of hers till some of the interests of her girlhood stirred in her again. The enthusiasm had gone, but she was wistful. And she'd sit thinking. She'd sit looking at her savings-book—all she had to show for her life. She figured out that she might break away from her employment and have luxury for a month. When the month was up she'd be destitute, but that didn't matter because, you see, she was quite prepared to go to sleep in the Thames. That little drudge, in that little stuffy lodging, took a notion to escape for once into the sunshine; she asked herself why she shouldn't *live* for a month—before she died! . . .

"She was timid when she went to buy the showy frocks; she touched the daintiest of them lovingly, but she was shy to choose them for herself. She felt that she had entered the store too late to wear the things she had hankered after so long. She came here the day after I arrived. She appeared a sad little body, sitting next to me at table; perhaps that was why I took to

her so; but now it just amazes me to think of the way she livened up when we had grown friends. I have heard her laugh, sir! I have heard her laugh quite happily, though her cash was melting like an ice cream in an oven; though she had come to tremble each time she changed a gold piece; though she had come to shudder at each sunset that brought her nearer to the End. It was only this afternoon that she told me the circumstances; I had seen she had anxiety, and I—asked questions. I looked to meet her again this evening, but I got a letter instead to say I should never meet her any more. When they handed me her letter she had—gone."

"You don't mean she—she's dead?" I whispered.

"Not yet," he said. "She wrote that our friendship had helped her some; she wrote that she was going back to her old lodging, and would struggle on. But she resigned her position, and she has damaged her last bank-note—how long do you surmise that she will have the heart to struggle?"

He lit another cigar; and among the jewelled, exotic crowd we stared absently over the rail at the humble flock of weary trippers who lacked the shillings to come in. One may do worse than cross to Ostend merely to stand by that slender rail and watch the two worlds that it divides.

At last I said: "She must have liked you very much. Her feelings for you made her want to live; and then, to remain here with you, she squandered the money that she needed to keep her alive."

"It makes me feel good, to hear you say so," he returned. "It is not encouraging that she has disap-

peared, knowing that she had never mentioned even the quarter where she lodged; but it would be the proudest moment of my life if that little lady would consent to marry me. When we get up we shall say 'Good-bye'—I am starting for London right away."

"Without a clue to her address?"

"Yes, *sir*, without a notion. I don't know where she lodges, and I don't know where she worked, and London's a mighty big city; but I estimate there are about two sovereigns between that woman and the river, and I have to find her before they're gone."

In his glance I saw the grit that had built his fortune. I tried to be hopeful.

"If she's hunting for a situation she'll look at the newspapers," I said.

"She will look at the columns that interest her," he answered, "but I mayn't advertise on every page."

"You can pay for inquiries."

"You may bet I'll pay; all that worries me is that inquiries go slow."

"I suppose you don't know which bridge it is she crosses every day?"

"We can build no hopes on the bridge," he replied; "I did not interrogate her—I did not suspect it was to be our last meeting."

"She may struggle longer than you think; she may be brave."

"You mean it kindly," he said, "but you have heard her history! I opine that I've got to discover that address within a week—I am racing against time. There's just this in my favour, she has a name to be noticed. She's called 'Joanna Faed,' and I guess there

can't be many women called that even in a city the size of London."

"What an extraordinary thing!" I faltered. "I can give you 'Joanna Faed's' address on half a hundred receipts. Why, she must be the lady who typewrites my stories for me!"

IV

A LETTER TO THE DUCHESS

"You said to me last night, Duchess, 'You are a great musician, Socoloski, but a great musician may be a great fool!' I had vexed you. If I should not know that, forgive me; perhaps it is common of me to recognise that I vexed you—I shall always be ignorant of the best manners. Pray be indulgent to my ignorance; pray let me write to you boldly, because I have something to say.

"But how difficult it is—I am a vulgarian, who can express himself only by his violin! I want to say that when you looked at me so kindly, I was not the dolt and ingrate that I seemed; I was very proud, very honoured. If I appeared insensible of your interest, it was because I had just been stricken by a grief which I dared not hint.

"I arrived at your house late last night. You will be revolted to learn what delayed me. When my recital was over, and I had escaped from the fashionable ladies who scrambled to kiss my hands, and pull buttons from my coat as keepsakes, I hurried to a minor music-hall to hear a girl in tinsel sing a trashy song. I hurried there because I loved her, Duchess, and I had much to

think of when I left. To understand what was in my heart when I reached your drawing-room, you must read my love-story from the beginning—my very vulgar love-story that will disgust you.

"Most of the things that you have seen about me in the papers were false—anecdotes invented by my agent. The public ask for anecdotes of their favourite artists, and it is business to give the public what they want. I generally play the music that they want, though it is seldom the music that I like best. I say that most of the things you have heard about me were false, but this much is true—my father was a peasant, and I have fiddled in a fair.

"I was happy. I have been told of artists who suffered agonies in their youth, always tortured by ambition, and dismayed by their obscurity. With me it was quite different. I was more joyous in a tent than I am now on the platforms. I even knew at the time that I was happy. That says much! Ungrateful, perhaps, I sound to you? Still, I shall be frank.

"I was thirteen when I first heard the words, 'You will be famous.' I was on my way to buy some apples, and the discussion that detained me bored me a great deal. So ignorant was I, that I swear to you 'Fame' said no more to me than that one day I should fiddle with a roof of wood over my head, and that storekeepers and farmers would spell my name from a bill at the doors.

"My patron had me educated. To him I owe, not only my position in the musical world, but the fact that I am able to write this letter. I shall not weary you by describing the years of study. When I began to under-

stand what lay before me, my apprenticeship looked an endless martyrdom; more than once I was at the point of flying from it. There is, they say, a special department of Providence for the protection of fools; it is Providence, no wisdom of my own, I have to thank that I am not still a vagrant scraping to villagers among the show wagons. The plans mapped out for me succeeded in spite of myself; at last the time arrived when it was said, 'Now we will commence!'

"Of course, I had come to my senses before this. So far from hankering after the tents of my boyhood now, I was ashamed to remember that I had ever played in them; so far from picturing Fame as the applause of shopkeepers in a shed, I thirsted for something more than the reception accorded me at my début. Ambition devoured me now. If I have the right to praise myself for anything, it is for the devotion with which I worked during the five years that followed.

"Well, I made a furore. Audiences rained roses on me, and struggled to reach the platform. Great ladies invited me to their receptions, and bent their eyes on me as if I were a god. I found it frightfully confusing; under my veneer, under my fashionable suit, I was still the peasant who had held his cap for coppers. I discovered that it was necessary for me to do more than master my art—that I was required to say interesting things to people who frightened me; my popularity suffered a little because I could not do it. The agent was furious at my bashfulness. 'You must speak to the ladies as if you were in love with them,' he told me; 'or if you cannot do that, be rude! Make

an effect *somehow*. You answer as if you were a servant.'

"Many of my eccentric remarks that you have heard, Duchess, have been composed with difficulty, and practised with care. The world will not have us as we are. My agent often returns a portrait-poster of me to the printer with the instructions, 'Put more *soul* into the eyes.'

"I am coming to my love-story. It was no further back than last year that I first met her. I had given a recital at Blithepoint, and was remaining there for a few days' rest. One evening I went to a variety entertainment in the pavilion on the pier.

"In the bill were three girls described as 'The Three Sisters Clicquot.' They appeared as theatre attendants —the programme sellers who show you to your box— and sang, to a rather plaintive air, that they once hoped to be 'stars' themselves. And then, having blossomed into gauze and spangles, they burlesqued melodrama. After their turn, two of the trio came into the stalls, and, by chance, I spoke to one of them; a Strong Man had broken a sixpence in halves, and thrown the pieces over the footlights—the girl asked me to let her see the piece that I picked up.

"I do not suppose I exchanged twenty words with her, and certainly I gave no thought to the incident; but a night or two later I drifted on to the pier again, and came face to face with her after the performance was over.

"She greeted me gaily. 'Hallo! Have you been in front?'

"'No,' I said; 'I am only strolling. Where are your sisters—are they really your sisters?"

"'Oh, no,' she answered. 'It's Nina Clicquot's show—good name to choose, eh? The other girl, Eva Jones, and I are engaged by her, that's all. This is my card.' From a battered purse she took a card on which was printed:

Miss Betty Williams

The Three Sisters Clicquot.

"We were near the entrance to the buffet. 'Will you come and have a drink?' I asked.

"'Oh, I don't think I will, thanks,' she said. 'I'm waiting for Eva—I might miss her.'

"'Oh, you'd better come,' I said.

"We went in and sat down at one of the tables. She did not strike me as particularly good-looking then; the spell of her face lay in its changefulness, and as yet I had not seen it change, for her capabilities as an actress were of the slightest. I saw merely a pale, slim girl, becomingly dressed in some dark stuff that was rather shabby; when she lifted her brandy-and-soda, a finger-tip showed through a glove. I wondered why I had brought her in, and was glad that there was no crowd to recognise me. It wasn't till she told me so that I was sure she recognised me herself.

"She said, 'I have never heard you play; I should love to! Did you get many people in down here?'

"I couldn't help smiling. Yet it had a pleasant

ring, that question. It revived the past—the days when I used to see the takings divided on the drum!

"'Oh,' she exclaimed, laughing, 'I forgot! Of course, you did—I'm not used to talking to big guns.' But there was no embarrassment in her apology—she might have been living among 'big guns' all her life.

"'How long have you been at it?' I asked her.

"'The halls? Three years,' she said. 'I was on the stage for a little while, not that I was up to much. I was the starving heroine once—the manager said I was the worst leading lady he had ever seen, but that I "looked the part," because I was all bones. I *am* a skeleton, aren't I? I chucked the stage; the halls pay much better—and my voice isn't bad. Of course, it's not a trained voice, but it isn't bad, eh? We have two shows a night next week—that means five pounds to me. Good for little Betty!' By the way, she was not little.

"'What do you with so much money?' One must say something.

"'Oh, I've plenty to do with it,' she said.

"'A husband to keep?'

"'Give us a chance!' she laughed. 'No, but mother doesn't make much by the shop any more—she's a costumier—and there are the kids to bring up—I've two young brothers. She did well once; I used to go up West, to try for engagements, dressed to kill—she lent me the models to put on. I often didn't have twopence in my pocket, but I looked a treat! The only thing was, I was so afraid of its raining—then we couldn't sell the model.'

"'You've had hard times?' I said, interested.

"She nodded gravely. 'Rough! I've always found very good pals, though. When I went into the chorus at the Regalia, I and a friend of mine hadn't a cent between us for 'bus fares; and there was an old Johnnie —one of the syndicate — who took to us. Quite straight! He said, "Look here, I know you two girls aren't getting enough to eat; I've booked a table at the Troc, and you're both to lunch there right through the rehearsals. If you can't get away for lunch, it's to be dinner; but one square meal a day the two of you must have regularly, or there'll be rows. Mind, it isn't to be a meal for more than two!"' Her face lit with laughter. 'There were some boys in the chorus just as stony as we were; my friend would lunch one day, and I'd lunch the next—we'd each take a boy in turn! But the old man found out what was going on—and the Troc was off! . . . I've had cases of champagne sent me, if you please! He was a wine merchant's son—wanted to marry me; his screw in the business was about a pound a week. Nice little fellow. He always called me "Jack." He used to say, "I can't come in the pit to see the show to-night—I haven't got a bob; but I have a case of champagne, Jack—it doesn't cost me anything!"'

"I liked it. For years I had conversed with only two kinds of women—the women who awed me, and the women who were awed. In five minutes I was as spontaneous as she. Her tones were, for the most part, very pleasant, and now that she was animated, the play of her features fascinated me. When we had finished our drinks we sauntered round and round the pavilion.

"'The performing birds are on,' she said, as we

caught the music; 'I hate that show; I hate an audience for standing it. Don't they know it's cruel? Performing birds make me think of the first bird you see die—you're a child, it's generally the first time you've looked at death. You bury your bird in the garden, and you line the grave with flowers, so that the horrid earth shan't touch it.' Her voice fell to a whisper.

"By the burst of applause that reached us in the moonlight I knew that the pavilion was packed.

"'That's Heracles, the Strong Man,' she said, as we listened again. 'What do you think of him? He's in love with my sister—I mean Eva Jones. He wanted to kiss her, and she put on side—oh, Eva was very haughty! "Sir, how dare you?" He had hold of her finger, and he drew her to him as if she had been a piece of paper. It was so funny, to see her going! He worships the ground she walks on, fact! That was the reason his challenge night was a frost—didn't you hear about his challenge night? He bet that no twelve men in Blithepoint could pull him over the line. Then he got drunk, because she wouldn't have anything to do with him—and they pulled him all over the stage. It cost him ten pounds, besides his reputation. He cried! "Ah, little girl," he said to her, "it is all through you!"'

"It was amazing, that on the boards she could not act! As I heard her tell this story, I would have sworn she was a born comédienne. The exaggerated dignity of Miss Jones, its ludicrous collapse, the humiliation of the Strong Man, she brought the scenes before me. 'Go on,' I begged, 'talk some more!'

"But before she could talk much more, the obdurate

Miss Jones appeared. I was presented, and wished them 'Good-night.' I could have seen them to their lodging, but—well, Miss Jones's attire was not to my taste, and she had forgotten to take the 'make up' off her eyes.

"I am writing more than I intended; I had no idea that my explanation would be so long!

"The next night I did walk to their lodging with them. It was Saturday, their last night in the town; on Monday they were to sing in a London suburb. Miss Jones had to leave a parcel with an acquaintance at the Theatre Royal, and, in her absence, Betty Williams and I paced the street alone. A quarter of an hour, perhaps. She was looking forward to the week at home. She was serious to-night; she talked to me of her mother and the 'boys.' I said I hoped she would find them well; and we shook hands—'Good-bye.' The incident seemed closed, but I went away with an impression I had never experienced before—the impression of having met some one who ought to have been my very good friend.

"When I breakfasted on the morrow, I felt blank in realising that her train had already gone. Every day I had to combat a temptation to run up to that suburb. When my holiday came to an end, I wondered if she was in town still. By a music-hall paper, I ascertained that The Three Sisters Clicquot were in Derby. Each week I bought the paper to learn the movements of The Three Sisters Clicquot; and each week I told myself it would be absurd of me to follow her so far. Eventually, I followed her to Yorkshire!

"What a town! The grey, grim streets, the clatter

of the clogs, the women's hopeless faces under the shawls! I put up at a commercial hotel—there was nothing else—and was directed to the Empire.

"Their name was far down the programme: 'Number 10: The Three Sisters Clicquot.' I began to think we should never reach it. Number 8 proved to be a conjurer, and my heart sank as I beheld the multitude of articles that he meant to use before he finished. Number 9 was a troupe of acrobats; a dozen times they made their bows and skipped off—only to skip on again and do some more. At last! The number '10' was displayed, the little plaintive symphony stole from the orchestra, the three girls filed on—Eva Jones, next Miss Cliquot, then Betty.

"I wondered if she would notice me. I saw her start—she smiled. I was so pleased that I had gone! We talked presently, in the passage under the stage. She was very surprised; I did not tell her that I was there only to meet her again. Once more I walked with her and Eva Jones to their door. In the morning I called on them.

"I stayed in the place four or five days. There were luncheons in the private room that I had been able to secure at the hotel. I went to tea with them at their apartments. In fine, I was very much in love, and I knew that I had been a fool. I knew it for a reason which will be difficult for you to credit, Duchess; this girl, who took a brandy-and-soda with a stranger in a bar, who accepted little presents from others, and dined with men who had only one motive for inviting her, remained perfectly virtuous. In different classes there are different codes—she did not regard her behaviour

as wrong; more, if she had committed the act which she knew to be wrong, she would have broken her heart. 'No matter how much a man cares for a girl,' she said to me once, 'he can't hold her any more sacred than she holds herself at the beginning. A girl saves herself for a man she is thinking of; she hasn't seen him—in all probability she never will see him; but she is saving herself for him—the imaginary man—from her head to her heels! . . . You tell me I "shouldn't do this," and I "shouldn't do the other"—I don't do any harm. If you knew how dull it is on tour, you'd understand my taking all the fun I can get. When a fellow asks me to lunch, I go; I say I'll go with another girl—that tells him everything, doesn't it? I swear to God I've only let one man kiss me in my life—and then I only did it out of pity, because he was so cut up. A man is never dangerous till he's beaten. Do you know that?' Well, I wasn't prepared to marry her, and she could be nothing to me if I didn't; I left Yorkshire with the firm intention of never seeing her any more.

"However, I missed her dreadfully, and, at the end of a month, I succumbed again. I went to Lancashire this time. The same impatience in my stall, the same quiver of expectancy at the plaintive introduction that was so familiar now, the same throb as the three girls appeared. Why should I bore you with details? I was with her all day, every day. Tea and chatter in the lodging became an institution, and we grew serious only when the melancholy dusk signalled her departure for the hall. She was not fascinated by her career: 'How I hate going in!' she murmured sometimes, as we reached the artists' entrance, with the group of

loafers spitting on the kerb. And I sat in front, just to see the turn, and talked to her again between the first performance and the second—in the passage at the foot of the dirty steps, where such draughts poured through the slamming door, and the gas-jet blew crooked in its cage.

"She was fond of me; I knew it. I had only to ask her to marry me—I knew that her consent wouldn't be due to my position. There were moments when I was very near to asking her. But I was Socoloski, and she —a third-rate variety artist. I shuddered to think what the Society ladies would say if their god stooped—for that matter, what everybody would say. No woman could have been more different from the wife I had pictured. Yet no woman had ever been so truly a companion to me. Always a bohemian at heart, I had naturally fallen in love with a bohemian; but when he draws a portrait of the wife that he desires, every man is conventional. Besides, you, and great ladies like you, had made me a snob. She drove with me to the station on the day I left. She knew I wouldn't go to her again —I heard it in her voice. That was the only time I felt dull when I was with her—we both could have said so much and were allowed to say so little. I remember the look in her eyes as the train crept from the platform. I shall always remember the look in her eyes as she smiled on the platform!

"Even a weak man may be strong sometimes—in the wrong place; I stuck to my resolve. At first, I still glanced at the *Encore*, just to know where she was, but before long I denied myself this too. Fortunately, my American tour started soon afterwards. The change

helped me while it lasted, but when I came back the struggle was as bad as ever. Six months had passed, yet every day I hungered to see her. I was desperate. I didn't know what to do to keep myself in hand.

"Duchess, my motive in addressing you is to write the truth, even the truths that one blushes to acknowledge. When I welcomed the dawn of your interest in me, I turned to you as a chance of forgetting *her*—I did not mean to prove so obtuse as I appeared last night. Perhaps, a gentleman might have seized the chance also, but, I suppose, only a cad would own it to you afterwards.

"And I couldn't forget! I never responded to your gaze without wishing it were hers. I resented the very gowns that you received me in, because *she* was poorly dressed. I hated myself for being in your drawing-room while *she* was trudging through the rain.

"My God! it's awful to think like that of a woman—to have the thought of her beset you as you open your eyes in the morning; to think till you're worn out with thinking of her, and pray to think of something else; to think of her till you want to escape from your own mind!

"Tolerate me a little longer—I have nearly done!

"Last Saturday, it was a year since I had seen her. I broke down—I was ready to make her my wife. I wondered if she would look as pleased as she used to look when she saw me—and then I froze at the thought that The Sisters Clicquot might be abroad, that they might have vanished altogether. When I searched the *Encore* again, I—there were emotions!

"'The Three Sisters Clicquot'! I found it. They

were in Portsmouth on Saturday; yesterday they were to be in town. It was impossible for me to go to Portsmouth; my prayer was that, after my recital yesterday, I might reach the London hall before she left. I had no means of knowing whether their turn would be late or early; all through that recital I was torn with the fear that I might miss her. The audience delayed me beyond endurance—I was trembling when I escaped from them. I stumbled into the carriage, and told the man to drive like mad.

"He couldn't find the stage-door, and, too impatient to keep still, I leapt out and went to the box-office. It was all right, they hadn't been on yet! There could be no chance to speak to her until the turn was over, so—just as I used to do—I sat down to wait in the stalls. Just as I used to do, I read the name of 'The Three Sisters Clicquot' in a programme, and wished that the preceding turn didn't last so long.

"I had taken it for granted that they would be giving a different song now—and my heart tightened at the greeting of that familiar symphony again. For an instant I could not look at the stage. I knew, with my head bent, the moment when the three girls filed on; I knew where they were moving, how they were standing—now the note that they were going to sing! I looked up for Betty's face—and saw a stranger.

"Oh, the horrible woman, the low, horrible woman! And I had to watch her, I watched her in spite of myself. The audience laughed and shouted while I sat there with the sickness of terror in me, while I watched that horrible woman posturing in Betty's place, and wearing the frock that Betty had worn.

"Afterwards, I found the artists' entrance, as I had proposed to find it—only I asked for Eva, instead of Betty. She came down to me, smiling, in her stage costume.

"'Who'd have thought of seeing *you!*' she exclaimed, as we shook hands; 'I was just going to change.'"

"'How are you?' I said dully, and our eyes questioned each other.

"'I suppose you know about Betty?' she said.

"I could only look at her.

"'She's dead,' she told me.

"The last turn was on—a comedian was bellowing doggerel. I listened to bars of it before I whispered, 'Dead?'

"'She got typhoid when we were in Lincoln—she died last month. Hadn't you heard?'

"'No. . . . It's still "The Three Sisters Clicquot" on the bills.'

"'Oh yes, of course—it's always 'The Three Sisters Clicquot.' . . . The new girl's not as good as Betty was—do you think so?'

"'I don't know.'

"The comedian was dancing now—I heard the rattle of his feet. Shabby, pasty-faced men kept hurrying past us through the passage, up the dirty steps; the door at the top was slamming, and the gas-jet blew crooked in its cage. It was strange to be among these things and not see Betty.

"'Good-bye,' I said. 'Did she ever talk of me after I went?'

"'Sometimes. She wasn't the girl to say much. Betty liked you, though.'

"'I liked Betty,' I said. . . . 'Well——'

"'Well,' she said, 'I must get along and change. Buck up!'

"And then I went to you, your Grace; I had promised to play to your guests, and I could not break my word. But you may understand what I was feeling while I played—that my thoughts were in a grave. And when we were alone, you may understand that, though you are charming, and beautiful, and a duchess, and exalted me by your caprice, I could not be guilty of that—outrage, that adultery towards the dead.

"Most humbly I beg you to believe that I esteem the honour you have done a man who was unworthy—who was loyal neither to you nor her. You will never pardon me for this letter. Good-bye!"

V

THE PRINCE IN THE FAIRY TALE

"*The carriage is at the door, Madam.*"

How strange that still sounds when the solemn butler says it—to me, Rosie McLeod! I go, wrapped in furs, down the great staircase, pass the two footmen—whose pomposity, if I may own the truth, rather frightens me—and enter my carriage in a dream. For a few minutes my grandeur seems unreal; I am remembering winters when I used to shiver in a spring jacket, and "japan" my summer straw. I feel as Cinderella must have felt on her way to the Ball, and, indeed, I hold my history no less fairy-like than hers, and my hero no less charming than her Prince. I want to write the tale, and to think that, far away in dear old England, other girls will read it. I ought to explain that I am writing in New York, a city I never expected to see in all my life. But let me begin at the beginning!

The beginning, then, was a draughty flat in West Kensington. In looking back at it I see always a delicate, sweet-faced woman sitting by the fire, and

a dark slip of a girl sketching at a table covered by a faded green cloth. The woman was my mother; the girl was I. I know now that I had a very little talent, but I meant to be an artist. When I sold my copy of "Shoeing the Bay Mare" one morning, while I was working at the National, I was prouder of myself than I have ever been since. Pray don't think I am vain of it yet; copies of that were rather easy to sell, and the girls in my time were accordingly eager for their turn to begin it; I only mention the matter because it was the first and the last money my mother saw me earn. Dear little mother! But we were very happy together, weren't we, although we were poor? Dear little mother, if you were living to-day, what lovely, lovely things you should have! . . .

At her death I was left quite alone. It is true that I had some second cousins, but I had not met them, and they showed no desire to meet me then. From one source and another I had about three hundred pounds, and in my ignorance I expected to support myself by my brush before the sum had melted. When I was free of the flat I took a lodging in Bayswater, and continued to study at a life-class. Excepting that I worked, and hoped, and very often cried, there is nothing to tell you of the next two years.

Then one afternoon I saw Miss Niblett in Kensington Gardens. She was an artist who had long been an acquaintance of ours. As far back as I remember she used to drop in to tea about twice a year, and talk of the great things she was going to do. She never seemed to grow any older, nor to do the great things. She was a spirited, chirpy, little woman, and when she settled in

Paris both my mother and I had missed her occasional visits very much. In the Broad Walk she greeted me as brightly as ever, and we strolled to the Round Pond, and talked for an hour. She was returning to Paris in a week's time, and I heard that she was living there in the cheapest possible way, occupying a studio and bedroom in the quarter called "Montparnasse," and marketing and cooking for herself. She told me of the great things she was going to do.

"Why don't you come back with me, child?" she asked presently. "Come and study in Paris, and then you won't be so lonely. Wouldn't you like to?"

"I should love it," I faltered, with a heart-thump, "but——"

"But, what?"

"I don't know. . . . For one thing, I can't speak French."

"Tut," cried Miss Niblett. "Hundreds of the girls don't speak French. You'll learn." For a minute we sat silent, gazing at the toy ships sailing across the pond. Then she added briskly, "You had better come!"

"All right," I said. And that was how I went.

Yes, I went to study in Paris, and to live in the queerest fashion imaginable. Our rooms were up ninety-eight stairs of a dingy house in a dilapidated court. At six o'clock in the morning the court used to wake, and be so exceedingly busy—and cheerful withal—that any one there would have been ashamed to lie abed. To begin with, there was the rushing of water outside, for taps there were none, and one by one the tenants clattered to a pump with a bucket

to obtain their supply for the day. Then the hawkers made their appearance, each with his own peculiar chant. "Fine mackerel! Yes, fine mackerel! Who will buy my fine mackerel this morning?" And "Mussels! Oh, mussels most delicious!" And "Watercress;" and "Milk—some fresh milk?" And I mustn't forget the noise that was made by shaking out the rugs from every window. I have never seen a city that opens its eyes so good-humouredly as Paris. In pictures it is always shown to us at night with its myriad lamps shining, or in the afternoon when it is frivolous, and its fountains flash; but, in my own little unimportant opinion, if one would know Paris at its sweetest and its best, one should get up very, very early, and behold it smiling when it wakes to work.

I have told you that we lived up ninety-eight stairs; I must tell you something about the people who lived on the lower landings. Of course the lower the landing, the higher the rent, but none of our neighbours had an air of opulence, need I say it? All of them bustled to the pump with pails, all of them cooked their own meals, and it was rather a rare occurrence, I believe, for everybody in that house to cook a dinner on the same day. On the floor below ours there was a Madame Troquet, who painted fans and chocolate boxes for a livelihood—the expensive and gorgeous boxes covered with satin, which fortunate people have sent to them at Christmas, and on their birthdays. Still lower there was an American youth who was studying Medicine. I am afraid he did not study it very hard; I should be sorry to think that if I were ill in America one day, he might be called in to prescribe for me. Lower still

there were two young Frenchmen; one of them wrote verses, and his companion made sketches for some of the papers. And—there was another American, who had moved in while Miss Niblett was in London. So good-looking!

He was about seven-and-twenty, and, oh! he was shabby. It made my heart ache to see the threadbare clothes he wore, even there where I had come to take threadbare clothes for granted. I used to meet him at the pump sometimes, and then he always insisted on carrying my pail for me. I felt horrid to let him do it. I guessed he didn't have enough to eat, and needed all his strength to drag his own pail up the stairs. Not that he showed any signs of weakness. He would mount beside me as gaily as if he liked the work, and the bucket were no more than a feather-weight. He seemed quite strong and happy, and—I have told you how nice-looking he was, haven't I?

A girl cannot allow a young man to carry a pail of water up ninety-eight stairs for her without thanking him. I mean it was impossible for me *just* to say "Thank you," as if he had handed me the toast, or picked up my sunshade. Of course we spoke as we went up the stairs. He told me he was an art student, like me, and I thought that no poor young man had ever been more courageous and contented with his lot—if one can call a little a "lot." He talked as if he loved the life. To listen to him one would have imagined that poverty—"Bohemianism," *he* termed it—was a kind of treat—a privilege for the Select, like a ticket for the Royal Enclosure. I used to forget to pity him till I looked at his coat.

"I think you are very brave," I couldn't help saying once.

"Brave?" he exclaimed. "Why, how's that? Where's the hardship? I think it's just the right thing for a man to carry home his bread for breakfast, and dine for a franc when he's rich. It's glorious—teaches him to be independent. And you?" he went on in a different tone. "Is it very hard for *you?*"

"Oh, I am one of the wealthy—for the time being," I laughed. "I have quite a fortune as yet."

"What shall you do when you have squandered your millions?" People did not stand on ceremony with one another at our pump.

"Paint," I said.

"Nobody to help you?" he asked.

"My own right hand," said I.

He regarded it ruefully. "The prospect is not so charming as the hand," he murmured, "is it?"

"It's glorious," I declaimed, "for a girl to carry home her bread for breakfast, and dine for a franc when she's rich."

"No, it isn't," he said. "For a girl it's a different thing altogether. You'll excuse my contradicting you? Besides, even a franc wants earning when you have no allowance from home."

"I shall sell my Work," I declared valiantly. In those days I always spelt my work with a capital W.

"I guess pictures take a deal of selling sometimes."

"I suppose you mean that you don't think I shall ever paint well?"

"I haven't seen anything you have done," he

answered; "how could I mean that? . . . Here we are at the top!"

We had reached our door, and Miss Niblett was standing there, a stiff little figure of disapproval. Considering that I was only showing the young man simple civility in return for his extreme kindness, I am bound to say that Miss Niblett's later remarks were absurd. Miss Niblett said she would go downstairs with the pail herself for the future.

When she came up the next morning I was all ears. Was she alone? . . . No, I could hear her speaking, and then there were steps, as some one turned away. "That Mr. Martin is certainly polite," she said, as she entered; "he insisted on bringing it up for me."

"*Who* did?" I inquired loftily.

"That Mr. Martin," she repeated. "Who else do you suppose would take the trouble?"

"Oh! *I* did not know his name *was* 'Martin,'" I explained. "You seem to be on very friendly terms with him."

"Tut," said Miss Niblett. "Don't be ridiculous, child, and make haste with the coffee, do!"

Though I did not meet Mr. Martin at the pump any more, I very often chanced to meet him on my way home from the art school. Each time I liked him better, and of course I knew I wasn't doing all the liking myself. He never *said* anything, but a girl can always tell, can't she? When I heard of the shifts that some of the young men in the house were put to for a meal, and thought that *his* straits must be as cruel as any of them, I could have cried. There were moments when food almost choked me, as I

pictured him sitting half starved in his room, his chin sunk on his breast. I never saw him with his chin sunk on his breast—never despondent in any way—but I was sure his buoyancy was just put on to hide his sufferings.

When I had been living in the court about two months, the sight of his coat, and the idea of his privations, proved too bad to be borne. We had become such good comrades by then—for the walk from the school took a long time, especially if one didn't walk very fast—that I thought he would let me speak like a sister to him.

"Mr. Martin," I murmured one day as we went home, "I want you to do me a great favour, please."

"Why certainly," he said. "Right now! What is it?"

"Well," I said, "we are both students, and we are very good friends, and it's all nonsense for you to reply that because I'm a girl you can't regard me as a real chum." And when I had stammered that, I turned hot, and gazed at the tips of my shoes.

"But I haven't replied anything of the sort," he said, with a laugh; "I'm waiting to hear what you want me to do."

"You won't be offended?" I asked.

"I'm sure I could never be offended with *you*," he said earnestly.

"Or hurt?" I added.

"I'm sure *you* would never hurt me."

"Well, then, I want you to let me lend you a little money till things are better. Will you?"

His eyes widened at me; and then he—blushed. He did, he blushed; I saw the colour spread right

up to his temples. I hated myself, though I had done my best to say it all delicately.

"I am very, very grateful to you," said Mr. Martin. "Believe me, I'm not in need of money. But you're a chum, indeed."

"Oh, you're too proud to confess," I gulped—and there was a lump in my throat that I couldn't swallow.

We were crossing one of the bridges, and I stopped and looked at the sun sinking, while I tried to blink my tears back. He stood there by me, and was quiet for a minute. When he spoke, I hardly recognised his voice, it trembled so much.

"Will you tell me something?" he whispered.

I nodded.

"Why did you say this to me?"

"Because I know you are poor, and *I'm* poor and can understand. But I could spare a small sum easily, and I thought you'd be great enough to let me help you."

"You *have* helped me," he answered; "helped me to ask you a question that I hadn't the pluck to put. . . . Dear little chum, do you care for me?"

"Yes," I told him.

"Enough to wait till a pauper can afford to marry you?"

"Yes," I told him.

"I love you," said Mr. Martin, "with all my heart!"

And the boats were sailing down the river, and a crowd was on the bridge, but I couldn't see them. In all Paris there was no one but ourselves. We were alone in the sunset—he and I!

I knew what Miss Niblett would say, and she said it—"Tut!" She warned me that I was doing a rash,

an improvident thing. And after she had reproached herself for bringing me to France, and prophesied a hopeless waiting and the workhouse for me by turns, she hugged me splendidly, and wished me happiness. There you have Miss Niblett!

Then my fiancé was invited up to supper, and we were merry. I was annoyed to see that, while I was making the salad, she had examined him about his prospects. Of course I did see it, when I came back, by his embarrassed look and Miss Niblett's air of dissatisfaction. Still I repeat that we were merry that evening, although I couldn't help regretting I had so often spoken to her of my fear that he didn't get enough to eat. It wasn't quite nice, while we sat at supper, to think she was reflecting that a substantial meal was by way of being a novelty to my lover. It hurt me, that.

Good little Miss Niblett! Though she had let me prepare the supper so that she might have a chance to pester him with questions, she made amends by clearing the things away herself. And shut the door behind her! That was the first time he kissed me. After all that has happened since, the scene remains clear and living to me—the little lamp-lit room, half studio, half parlour, the scent of the mignonette in the open window, and the Promised Land I saw beyond. When I am old and grey, it will be living to me still —his voice, his touch, and the joy that was singing in my heart.

And by and by we all went out. "I have pennies to spend," pleaded my lover; "let's be lavish!" Could I be wise on such a night? Away we sped from Montparnasse into the Paris where the cabs darted and the

cafés glittered; and we had syrups and fizzy waters under the trees in the starlight, and made-believe that we were rich. I thought Miss Niblett must have been in love herself once upon a time—she was so tactful. It was a long ramble that we took. Like children we joked outside a jeweller's window, pretending to choose the costliest of engagement rings; like vagrants we loitered by a great house where a reception was being held. Yes, we stood there on the pavement and watched the grand people arriving; and for the first time for hours I remembered we were poor.

"Why aren't *we* going to a party? How lovely it would be!"

"Are you keen on parties?" my lover asked; "perhaps I could take you to one this week. Shall I try?"

"A party like that?" I laughed. "Yes, please!"

"Ah, well," he replied, "I can't guarantee that it will be quite like that. Still, I guess it will be rather fun. Will Miss Niblett go, too?"

"I?" she exclaimed. "Don't talk nonsense!"

"I wonder," he said, "which is the best place in this city to hire a suit of dress-clothes for the evening. My social gaieties have given me no cause to find out."

That was all. We turned homeward. I thought with Miss Niblett that he had been talking nonsense. Imagine how surprised I was to hear him revive the subject after a day or two.

"Well, it's all right," he said; "I've managed it. We're invited."

"Invited?" I echoed. "Invited where?"

"Why, to the festivity to-morrow night."

"But," I cried, "you didn't really mean it, did you?

You didn't suppose I'd go? The people are strangers to me."

"Oh, that's nothing," he answered. "In Society they often go to strangers' parties. It's rather chic."

"Well, we aren't in Society," I reminded him. "I'm not chic. I can't go junketing with a lot of students I have never seen before."

"You'll never be a bohemian, Rosie," he said; "you don't seem to catch on to the tone of the Quarter at all. Now, do come! If you're a good girl you shall be rewarded. You see I have my clothes ready, and it would disappoint me some not to get a chance to show 'em off."

He made such a point of it that I promised. But I wasn't pleased. Besides being reluctant to intrude, I was annoyed at the thought of having put him to expense; also the idea of his going to a party in a hired suit was distasteful to me. I went to my school as cross as two sticks.

Early the next morning he ran upstairs in a great hurry to borrow our newspaper. I wondered why he wanted it, for he always read *Le Temps*, and we took the *Daily Messenger*, one of the English papers that were published in Paris. However, we were busy, and let him have it, though we hadn't looked at it ourselves yet. We were busy examining the white silk frock I meant to wear. I was for freshening it with some new tulle, and Miss Niblett kept saying it would be folly to spend the money. The argument lasted such a long time that I didn't go to the school at all that day. Miss Niblett won.

And then behold an afternoon of amazement! As I

was boiling the kettle, there came a rap at the door, and whom should I admit but a stylish young woman with a note and a large box! The note consisted of four words—"Frills for the Fairest!" and the box contained —a dress. But, my dears, a dress that I can't describe to you! I should need a page to do it justice; such a dress as the fairy godmother might have created when she changed a pumpkin to a chariot.

"What does it mean?" I gasped.

"Is that from him?" stammered Miss Niblett.

"Oh, don't you know it's from him?" I cried hotly. "Now I see why you wouldn't let me buy the tulle! But how can he have paid for it, and how could you encourage him?"

I thought she was going to cry. "Rosie," she whimpered, "he told me he wanted to give you a dress, and asked me to help him, but I never imagined he meant a dress like that; I didn't indeed! How could I? Oh, my child, look at the name on the lid—look where it comes from!"

"Mademoiselle will try it on?" suggested the young woman coolly.

"*What* does she say?" I demanded. She spoke French, of course. It is to be hoped she didn't understand English.

"She says you had better try it on."

"This is madness," I faltered. I looked from the young woman to Miss Niblett; I looked from Miss Niblett back to the frock. "Madness!" I repeated—and tried it on. Oh, what a frock! There were exclamations, and pins, and stitches. And in the middle of it all came another bang at the door.

A porter in uniform stood on the landing. He, too, bore a note and a box; he, too, behaved as if miracles happened every day in the year.

Four words again—"Suède for the Sweetest!"

Gloves, if you please!—a stack of them, with I can't tell you how many buttons, and the faintest odour of violets. I know now that in the whole of Paris there is only one shop that sells gloves quite like those; and they are famous all over the world.

A knock at the door! By this time we opened it speechlessly—we just glanced at each other and tottered. And again four words—"Bonds for the Best." I tore off the brown paper with hands that shook. Under the brown paper, tissue paper; under the tissue paper, the glint of velvet, pale blue; I drew out a jewel case; I pressed a spring, and——

"Oh gracious!" screamed Miss Niblett.

Shimmering on the satin with which the case was lined lay a "rope" of pearls fit for an empress. Not even a string—a "rope!" Three times round the neck it would wind, and hang almost to the waist. We fell on to the sofa, dazed.

"Are they real?" Miss Niblett panted. "Oh, my dear! Give me the case. My dear! They *are* real, I'm sure they are. Oh, my dear! they must be worth thousands upon thousands of pounds. What *does* it all mean?"

And for the rest of the day not a glimpse of my fiancé, not a message from him. Monsieur Martin was out, the concierge told us when we inquired. It had been arranged that he should come for me at ten o'clock, and at half-past eight I began to dress. We lit every candle

in the flat that evening. At five minutes to ten I was ready—all but one glove. We sat trembling with curiosity. Then we heard him—singing on the stairs; and he tapped as the hour struck.

"Now!" we both cried. "Perhaps you'll explain?"

If his clothes weren't his own, he had discovered a remarkable establishment; I noted that, despite my dizziness. I fancy I have mentioned how nice-looking he was, but I had never really done him justice before. He was worthy to take his frock out! He stood there admiringly, presenting a bouquet.

"Explain?" he murmured. "Oh, you mean those things I sent you? My dear ladies, patience is one of the most beautiful of virtues—let us cultivate it! Rosie, you're a dream of loveliness! I thought perhaps you'd like a few flowers. Shall we go?"

And we went. I had expected to see a cab at the corner; there was a brougham, with a footman waiting on the curb.

"Not mine," said the Man of Mystery, "I assure you. Hired!"

"Like your clothes?" I flashed.

"Much more so," he said serenely. "Would you prefer the window up, or down, dear?"

"Either," I said, "if you'll tell me where we're going."

"Why, to the party," he replied; "I thought you knew."

"You don't ask me to believe we're going to a student's supper, dressed like this?"

"Well, no," he said. "I guess we'd be a trifle overpowering, eh? But I never told you it was a student's

supper. That student was an invention of your own."

We rolled along luxuriously. To my bewilderment, it seemed that all the Capital was astir that night. Crowds, crowds everywhere in the brilliant streets—Paris was a panorama of lights and faces. After a while we began to move more slowly; other vehicles impeded us. I could hear the jangling of horses' bits, the orders of the police.

"We're drawing close," said my lover.

The clatter of hoofs was to right and left of us now. From the window I saw the glare of carriage lamps, caught glimpses of great ladies' gowns and jewelled heads. The brougham swung through gates into a courtyard.

"We are there," said my lover.

I stood on the steps of a palace. On either side of me soldiers were drawn up, startling, spectacular. Music swelled through the doorway. Flunkeys bowed at our approach.

"Where have you brought me?" I whispered. "Whose house is this?"

"He's called the President of the French Republic," was the answer. "Don't be shy."

We passed through the dazzle of the hall. The lights blinded me, and the scent of the roses was very strong. I heard great names spoken, names that made me catch my breath. As those awe-inspiring names were uttered, the scene became more and more unreal. And the guests, the guests who bore the historical names, looked quite ordinary, prick-me-and-I-shall-bleed persons. I think that was the most vivid impression I had in

the Elysée—the difference between the persons and their names.

Soon through the throng—among the regal toilettes of the women, and the groups of distinguished, "decorated" men—I grew conscious of the figure of an elderly gentleman, with iron-grey hair and a rather sad smile, moving near to us. I recognised him by photographs that I had seen—and I knew it was the President himself.

"Now," said the voice at my side, "I'm going to present you to him. Try to look as if you liked it."

For an instant I saw the other end of the glittering salon turning very, very small and dim, and I thought I was going to faint. I hadn't the slightest notion whether I ought to put out my hand to him, or kiss *his* hand, or sweep a curtsy. And if you want to know which of the three I did, I am unable to tell you; but my lover affirmed afterwards that I was "real charming," and you may take his word for it, if you are kind enough. I can't pretend that it convinces *me*, for I never felt such a gawk in all my days.

I don't know how long we stayed at the Elysée; I have a vague recollection of eating an ice. But the next thing I remember clearly is our entering the brougham again, and driving away into the fresh sweet air. Then I leant towards him.

I said, "If you've any consideration for me, you'll answer right off, and tell me whether I'm awake or asleep. I have pinched myself three times, and I'm still not sure."

"You darling!" he laughed. "I was afraid you'd

read it all before I confessed; that was why I stole your newspaper."

"So you did!" I exclaimed. "Why are you in the paper?"

"Well, you see, Rosie Posie, I bought those pearls for you yesterday," he said, "and I had to get the bank to identify me; I suppose the jewellers chattered last night." He took the paper from his overcoat, and there, if you can believe me, by the light of the little electric lamp over our heads, this is what I saw:

"An American Millionaire's Son in Montparnasse!
Mr. Martin McLeod plays at Poverty!!
The Extraordinary Experiment of a Young Crœsus!!!"

After that, what remains for me to tell you? What his father said? Well, his father didn't object to me a bit, and always declares that Martie's marriage was the most sensible action of his life. Though that's nonsense! We spend six months of the year in America, and the other six in Europe. Miss Niblett is still in Paris. I am afraid she will never do the "great things," but she will never be hard up any more, for my "prince" is as generous as he is rich. The story I have tried to write is finished. *Isn't* it as marvellous as any fairy tale? But it is true! And I wonder if any woman has ever been so blessed as I, and thank God for my great happiness.

"*The carriage is at the door, Madam.*"

Oh, is it indeed? Well, I am not going out just yet, for there is a little girl running across the room to say that "Mother has been writing long enough, and must come and play." And there's Martie!—Martie with his arm round me, looking down in my face.

VI

THE THIRD M

Otto Van Norden wrote ballads that were popular; but to attain this eminence he had, in his youth, sacrificed commercial prospects which might easily have provided him with wealth. So he often lamented his choice of a career as a terrible mistake. Nevertheless, as he had some private means, his life was no martyrdom, though he aspired vainly to a mansion and a motor. He had pleasant rooms, a good tailor, was frequently to be seen at the second-best restaurants, and spent as much of his time as possible on the Continent. It was, indeed, Van Norden who shocked the owner of a Confession-book by describing his favourite pastime as "Leaving England," and his pet aversion as "Coming back to it."

At the age of forty he fell seriously in love. He was a selfish man, though he inclined to lyrics like "Heaven were a Blank without Thee," and "My Life for my Lady's Glove," and he battled against the temptation bravely. Violet was young, captivating, and sang his ballads with considerable expression—he had really no chance. He took a wife, and a villa in Dulwich; and if the music pirates hadn't begun to be so industrious,

it is possible that he might have escaped regret, even in the suburb that looks like a cemetery.

To write popular songs in a country where stolen music may be exposed for sale on every kerbstone butters no parsnips; and for matrimony the composer's private means were a tight fit. Not many quarter-days had elapsed before he felt that his marriage had been as big a blunder as his profession. "Music and marriage!" sighed Van Norden to the long, sad, empty roads of Dulwich; "but for music and marriage how well off I might have been?" And then it struck him that both the calamities of his life begun with an M.

Some men might have attached no importance to it; Otto Van Norden was impressed. He said that it was queer, this influence of the initial "M"—he was of the opinion that it "meant something." Perhaps there was a warning to be derived? Yes, that must be it! If a third catastrophe occurred, doubtless the third, too, would be alliterative—and perhaps fatal. M was evidently an initial ominous to him, an initial to be shunned. From that moment he grew nervous of things beginning with an M. He abandoned the wish to revisit Mentone; and he would not have attempted a march if his publishers had begged for one.

More quarter-days flashed by, and meanwhile his fortunes remained unchanged. Self-respecting citizens still bought the stolen music, the private income was still a tight fit, and Dulwich was still the most melancholy of the suburbs. Then, when he had been married for three annual rentals, and a water-rate over, hopes were entertained of a son and heir—and Violet suggested calling him "Marmaduke." The composer was profoundly

agitated; her proposal was no caprice—she had an uncle Marmaduke with money—and Van Norden knew very well that opposition must appear to her unreasonable, since he could not explain it without hurting her feelings.

He contested the point with tact. Kindly, but firmly, he disparaged the name of "Marmaduke" for months, all through the spring in fact. It was a name, he pointed out, more adapted to an elderly gentleman of portly presence than to a baby. It was not a tractable name, not amenable to abbreviation. Assuming that the child had a sensitive disposition, Violet would condemn him to years of suffering, for a boy who was christened "Marmaduke" would, when he went to school, certainly be called "Marmalade." The last argument was at once successful; Violet's eyes filled with tears, and as she thanked her husband for sparing the "poor little fellow" the consequences of her thoughtlessness, the composer's relief was deeper than any who mock presentiments can understand.

This was the first "M" that had menaced him since he perceived the significance of the initial to him, and nothing else noteworthy occurred until November. One day in November, when a pink-and-white bassinette was in readiness for the "little fellow's" advent, the master of the house awoke feeling as if he had a marble under his tongue. He did not mention the matter to Violet, but breakfasting with such an unfamiliar mouth was so discomfiting that he sent the servant up to Dr. Lachlan with a request to him to look in during the morning.

"I don't know what's happened to my mouth, Lach-

lan," he said; "it's for all the world as if a marble had rolled underneath the tongue in the night."

"Let us have a look at it," said the medical man. "Ah! Yes! Y-e-s, that hasn't come in the night—it's been coming for some time."

"Is it serious?"

"No, not necessarily. It wants removing."

"Removing?" echoed Van Norden. "What do you mean by 'removing'—you don't mean 'operating'? Don't you think a—a good lotion——?"

"Oh no, we shall have to operate," said Dr. Lachlan. "You may put it at the morning after next. Meantime, I'll get a competent anæsthetist, and arrange about a nurse for you."

"But—but it's very serious indeed," faltered the composer, dismayed. "Am I sure to get better? People sink under operations; we know that an operation is always 'performed successfully,' but that the patient often dies the next day. What's the matter with me, what have I got?"

"It's what we call 'Myxoma.'"

"My God!" exclaimed Van Norden. "It begins with an M!"

He was now intensely alarmed for himself. He was also alarmed lest the news reached the ears of Violet, who was in no condition to be told such things. However, on the next morning but one she was unable to rise, so the preliminaries passed unnoticed by her. In a room on the first floor, Madame awaited the arrival of the son and heir; in a room on the second, Monsieur awaited the arrival of the surgeon. Few circumstances could have been more adverse to marital tranquillity;

few circumstances therefore could have been less favourable to the operation.

The first person to tap at the second-floor door was the nurse engaged by Dr. Lachlan.

"Good-morning, nurse," said Van Norden. "Nobody has come yet; sit down, make yourself at home."

"Thank you," said the nurse. She added sympathetically, putting on her apron, "It's a trying time for you, I hear, what with one thing and another, sir?"

Lachlan came in, as blithely as if it were a party. "Well, how are we this morning?" he asked. "Good spirits? That's right! You'll be glad you've had this done—you'll feel much better, once it's over. Ah, here's the man I'm waiting for! 'Morning, Major."

"Er, Dr. Major, pleased to meet you," murmured the composer, feebly untruthful. Already the bedroom was taking a strange aspect to him, the aspect of a hospital. Bandages and bottles seem to have sprung from nowhere. Lachlan poured fluids briskly in basins before the window, and Major set out mysterious articles from a black bag on the chest of drawers. The paraphernalia spread incessantly, and the nurse continued, as if by magic, to produce sheets and cans of hot water without having quitted the room.

"I think we'll move the bed, nurse," said Lachlan, and they pulled it into the middle of the floor. The anæsthetist felt the patient's pulse, and applied the stethoscope; and Van Norden noticed for the first time that the pattern of the wall-paper resembled pink mushrooms in bunches of vermicelli.

An oppressive "tent" was placed over his mouth. He felt very helpless, very childish all at once. The

vapour of the "A.C.E." grew suffocating; his heart began to thump as if it would burst. He signalled the danger to Lachlan, and Lachlan gave a nod. Van Norden glared impotently—he was sure that he was the victim of a blunder, that this pounding of the heart was too violent to be safe. Now there was a roaring in his ears. The idiots were killing him—and he was gagged, defenceless! Momentarily he was faint with terror, and then a lethargy which he mistook for courage stole through him; it surprised him to perceive with what stoicism he confronted death. Yes, he was listless! After all, it was not unpleasant. It didn't matter. Nothing mattered. Nothing mattered in the least.

His next impression was of being very cramped. On the horizon of his consciousness lurked the remembrance of the operation, and he assumed vaguely that it was over. He lay waiting to be congratulated, wondering why nobody spoke to him. Had he been left alone? He felt so bewilderingly limp that he couldn't turn, but he opened his mouth to say, "Are you there, Lachlan?" and to his horror, emitted nothing but a baby's bleat. His mouth remained open with amazement, and gigantic fingers suddenly thrust something sickening into it, while an unfamiliar voice made ridiculous noises at him.

Consternation held Van Norden spell-bound. There were seconds in which he feared that he was insane. Presently another thought assailed him, one so startling that his blood ran cold. Minutes passed, minutes too terrible for words to paint. He gathered the fortitude to examine as much as was exposed of his person—the hands belonging to him were minute, the hands of an

infant! He stared at them aghast and shuddering. There could be no doubt of it—he had died under the operation, and been born again! All that was natural enough, but the unforeseen and fearful thing was that he still remembered.

He was once more a baby. Whose? The immense import of the question throbbed in him. Where he lay he could see no more of the room than the ceiling, and he was unable to judge whether he had been reincarnated in a mansion or a hovel. There had been a royal princess expecting a baby, he reflected. "Great Scott!" thought Van Norden, "suppose I'm royalty this time?" But the remaining pessimism in him rejected the fancy almost as it rose. "Too good to be true!" he mused. "I expect my father's a beggarly artist, or a curate—I don't suppose I'm even an only child! It's a ghastly situation—I wonder at what age one begins to forget?"

The woman with the gigantic fingers—or fingers comparatively gigantic—was speaking to some one now, and Van Norden listened intently, in the hope of ascertaining something of his prospects.

"Yes," said the woman, "and her, too, poor soul—don't know anything about it yet, of course! They won't tell her for days. He died a moment before the mite was born. Wrote songs, and suchlike! Yes, they say the operation was quite successful, but he didn't rally—too weak, you know. Oh, awfully sad!"

"Grant me patience!" thought Van Norden; "I might have known it—I'm in that damned house in Dulwich still!"

"A quiet little thing, poor orphan, ain't it?" the

monthly nurse went on; and then she leant over the cradle, and made the ridiculous noise at him again. In a burst of fury, Van Norden tried to swear at her, but he could only produce the baby's bleat. He yearned to be quiet, to be left undisturbed—there was so much to consider. He had allowed his life-policy to lapse, and now he bitterly repented the false economy. He wondered what the furniture would fetch, and if Violet would be enabled to bring him up properly. Perhaps his father-in-law would come to her assistance?—his "grandfather," he ought to say now! It would be a pretty kettle of fish if his widow—that was to say his "mother"—were left to her own resources. What would become of him? A board school, and a junior clerkship! "I suppose it's entirely problematical whether I shall even inherit my musical talent?" mused the unhappy infant. "It's a nice look-out for me, I must say!"

"But there," added the woman, "a girl baby always does keep quieter than a boy—I'm always thankful to see it a girl. Ookytooky, then! Ain't I, my precious? Lor, the blessed lamb's choking!"

Van Norden had indeed turned purple in the face. A girl! Culminating calamity, a girl! The blankness of the girl's outlook, the poverty of the marriage that she must expect to make, was overwhelming. "Why," Van Norden asked herself passionately, "*why* has this thing happened to me? Among all the births that were taking place in the world, couldn't they have spared me a decent one? I don't harp on a palace, but, say, reasonable advantages? Opulent people are having sons every minute, yet *I* must go as the daughter of a

widow in straitened circumstances. Upon my soul, it's heartrending!"

However, when she and Violet met again, she was somewhat consoled by the warmth of her mother's welcome, and after the news of the bereavement was broken, the young widow cooed so tenderly of the manifold virtues of "darling papa" that Van Norden was quite touched. "A good sort!" meditated Van Norden, as Violet joggled her up and down; "I had no idea at the time that she appreciated me so much."

In hours of comparative resignation there was nothing more fascinating to Van Norden, while she lay in the pink-and-white bassinette, than to mark the development of her new identity—the process by which the trivial pains and pleasures of the moment attained supreme importance, and the pressing anxieties which beset her at the hour of her birth became gradually blurred. The fact would have appeared incredible to the baby formerly had she heard with how little fret and jar the human mind adapted itself to another form and sex; she would not have believed the Ego could renounce so easily its interest in many matters, which, to its previous incarnation, had been absorbing. And doubtless, she reflected, she would disbelieve it again later.

Her attitude towards the bottle, for instance, fascinated her extremely. At first she had regarded it with disdain. Even when she recognised its suitability to her physical needs, she had merely tolerated the thing as a disagreeable necessity. This contempt, this suction under protest, was very brief. Soon she grew to relish the bottle, to clamour for it when it was late. Then,

too, she was able to extract amusement from a coral-and-bells, and was again engrossed by the ticking of a watch. "Marvellous!" thought Van Norden, while she hovered at the parting of the ways, "marvellous thing, Nature, upon my word!" But, a trifle humiliated at moments like these, she would throw the coral, or watch, on the floor, and set up a howl. The devoted Violet often mistook the humiliation for a pin, and undressed her —an indignity which annoyed Van Norden more still.

Before she was six weeks old Van Norden had ceased to consider the financial position, and accepted without question who provided; she began to yield to the charm of the bottle and the watch unreservedly, and had scarcely a remaining care. Only while she plucked at Violet's crêpe, the past whispered in her, and a dim consciousness that the relations between her mother and herself were involved clouded the infantile brow.

"What's she thinking about, a love?" Violet would murmur, swaying her to and fro. "Doesn't she look worried, a pet!" And from the lap that was once Van Norden's wife's, Van Norden would raise great eyes to her solemnly.

When eight or nine months had passed, this glimmer of memory, which had then become nearly extinct, was fanned to ardour by a painful circumstance. They had gone to Dieppe with Violet's parents, and in the hotel Violet made the acquaintance of a Major somebody. The acquaintance had progressed when Van Norden was first brought in contact with him in the garden, and the gentleman paid the pretty widow marked attentions, and grinned at her baby propitiatingly.

"Jolly little chap," remarked the Major, worrying Van Norden with a forefinger.

"It's a little girl, Major," said Violet, smiling reproval.

"Oh, confound it all! I mean, how stupid of me!" faltered the Major. "Lovely little thing, anyhow. I suppose you're awfully proud of her, Mrs. Van Norden, eh? The only pebble on the beach, what? It seems awfully rum to see you with a baby, though—you look such a girl, don't you know."

"What nonsense!" said Violet, blushing; "I'm an elderly woman if one counts one's age by one's troubles." She glanced significantly at her weeds, and sighed.

"Oh, ah, of course I understand; I—I can sympathise, I can indeed. But you shouldn't think of your troubles too much, Mrs. Van Norden, if I may say so—you should buck up. Life, after all, is——" He struggled with his eyeglass, and failed to enunciate his sentiments on life.

"Life is very, very strange," said Violet, gazing pensively at the sea.

"Isn't it?" said the Major eagerly. "Just fancy, it's only a week since I met you, what?"

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of that," she murmured.

"*I* am," said the Major, "I think of it lots. It seems so rum, don't you know, that I'd never seen you till a week ago. Don't you think that sometimes people meet who were meant to meet, and that for them a week scores more than years and years of society between people who—well, who only happen to meet because they're introduced, don't you know?"

Van Norden lay communing with herself. In the

little brain the voice of the past cried for recognition. She eyed the adults darkly, agitated by the sense of a tragedy which she sought piteously to define. The soul of the baby sprawling on the cushions was symptomatic of marital jealousy, though the mind failed to diagnose the disease. Distressed and puzzled, Van Norden burst into startling screams and kicked her little limbs about furiously. Violet was unable to pacify her, and, much alarmed, was about to dispatch the Major for the nurse when through the windows of the salon came the prelude to a song, and some one began to sing "Heaven were a Blank without Thee." The baby's paroxysm ceased almost at once, her gaze grew wide. Striking her ear when it did, the ballad that she had created in her preceding incarnation revivified her consciousness of the former life. The veil was rent; the female infant was at heart a husband—and looking in the faces of Violet and her new lover, Van Norden remembered all.

She could say nothing—speech was not yet granted to her—could not proclaim, "I am Otto," though she beheld her widow wooed by another man. Life holds no moment more terrible than an experience like this. Nor did her agony fade with her banishment from the scene. On the contrary, her helplessness intensified her sufferings; too young as yet to toddle, incapable of intruding where she wished, Van Norden was constantly racked by tortures of the imagination. Consumed with jealousy, and craving to be in the salon, she was compelled to lie fuming in her cot—or was strapped in her perambulator while her frenzied fancy followed Violet and the Major into the Casino.

Soon she employed the only weapon in her power, and kicked and screamed as often as an attempt was made to remove her from Violet's presence. By this means she witnessed much that would otherwise have been hidden from her, was indeed a witness of her successor's proposal. Stricken with resentment, the babe that had once been the widow's husband lay in her lap while the Major begged her to be his wife.

"I know it's a bit early for me to speak," he stammered, "but I can't help it—if I let you go away without telling you how much I care for you, I might never see you again. Only give me a word—I'll wait. I'll be as patient as I can, but tell me that there's a chance for me."

She was silent a long while; evidently she was much moved. At last she murmured, "I don't know what to say."

"Can't you care a bit for me?"

"Ah, it isn't that!" she owned tearfully.

"Darling! Dearest!"

"Sh!" she said, "you oughtn't. It's so soon; and —oh, I don't know, there's so much to consider. There's my child." She clasped Van Norden protectively.

"You don't suppose I'd be rough on it?" cried the Major. "Why, I give you my word—just as if it were my own. Violet, in a few months' time? Will you marry me in a few months' time?"

He leant lower, and she raised her gaze; the next instant they had kissed across Van Norden's head. All the rekindled manhood in the infant's consciousness

flamed to avenge the outrage, burned to strike the supplanter down, to destroy him. The disparity between the virile impulse and the tiny frame was maddening. Purpling with shame and indignation, Van Norden reared to spit at him, but could only dribble.

No child of nine months is capable of supporting such a mental strain, and soon afterwards Violet had to send in hot haste for a medical man. He spoke gravely of removing something from the brain.

"'Removing' something? You don't mean 'operating'?"

"Yes, we shall have to operate," answered the doctor, and Van Norden was kept in her cot.

There was a morning when a trained nurse came to her side putting on an apron, and the surgeon followed. Violet and the Major were present, the Major soothing her.

"I think we'll move the bed," said the surgeon, and Van Norden lay staring through the window at the brilliant sky.

The room began to acquire a novel air. The nurse produced sheets and cans of hot water from nowhere; the surgeon poured fluids in basins briskly. The Major set out mysterious articles from a black bag on the chest of drawers. The sky developed a pattern of pink mushrooms and bunches of vermicelli — and Van Norden came to his senses.

He saw Lachlan looking at him.

"Well, how do you feel?" asked Lachlan. "We've got rid of your Myxoma for you. And your wife's first-rate. You've a little son waiting downstairs—fine boy, too."

"Fine boy?" murmured the composer drowsily, "no, I was a fine girl."

"Not quite come round yet, nurse," said Lachlan; "let him sleep the rest of it off, and he'll be as right as rain."

VII

TRICOTRIN ENTERTAINS

One night when Pitou went home, an unaccustomed perfume floated to meet him on the stairs. He climbed them in amazement.

"If we lived in an age of miracles, I should conclude that Tricotrin was smoking a cigar," he said to himself. "What can it be?"

The pair occupied a garret in the Rue des Trois Frères at this time, where their window, in sore need of repairs, commanded an unrivalled view of the dirty steps descending to the Passage des Abbesses. To-night, behold Tricotrin, pacing the garret with dignity, between his lips an Havannah that could have cost no less than a franc. The composer rubbed his eyes.

"Have they made you an Academician?" he stammered, "or has your uncle, the silk manufacturer, died and left you his business?"

"My friend," replied the poet, "prepare yourself for 'a New and Powerful Feuilleton of the Most Absorbing Interest!' I am no longer the young man who went out this evening—I am a celebrity."

"I thought," said the composer, "that it couldn't be you when I saw the cigar."

"Figure yourself," continued Tricotrin, "that at nine o'clock I was wandering on the Grands Boulevards with a thirst that could have consumed a brewery. I might mention that I had also empty pockets, but——"

"It would be to pad the feuilleton shamelessly," said Pitou: "there are things that one takes for granted."

"At the corner of the Place de l'Opéra, a fellow passed me whom I knew and yet did not know; I could not recall where it was we had met. I turned and followed him, racking my brains the while. Suddenly I remembered——"

"Pardon me," interrupted the composer, "but I have read *Bel Ami* myself. Oh, it is quite evident that you are a celebrity—you have already forgotten how to be original!"

"There is a resemblance, it is true," admitted Tricotrin. "However, Maupassant had no copyright in the Place de l'Opéra. I say that I remembered the man; I had known him when he was in the advertisement business in Lyons. Well, we have supped together; he is in a position to do me a service—he will ask an editor to publish an 'Interview' with me!"

"An 'Interview'?" exclaimed Pitou. "You are to be 'Interviewed'? Oh no, my poor friend, too much meat has unhinged your reason! Go to sleep—you will be hungry and sane again to-morrow!"

"It will startle some of them, hein? 'Gustave Tricotrin At Home'—in the illustrated edition of *Le Demi-Mot?*"

"Illustrated?" gasped Pitou. He looked round the attic. "Did I understand you to say 'illustrated'?"

"Well, well," said Tricotrin, "we shall move the beds.

And, perhaps, the concierge will lend us a palm from the portals. With a palm and an amiable photographer, an air of splendour is easily arrived at. I should like a screen—we will borrow one from a studio in the Rue Ravignan. Mon Dieu! with a palm and a screen I foresee the most opulent effects. 'A Corner of the Study'—we can put the screen in front of the washhand-stand, and litter the table with manuscripts—you will admit that we have a sufficiency of manuscripts?—no one will know that they have all been rejected. Also, a painter in the Rue Ravignan might lend us a few of his failures—'Before you go, let me show you my pictures!' said Monsieur Tricotrin: 'I am an ardent collector!'"

In Montmartre the sight of two "types" shifting household gods makes no sensation—the sails of the windmills still revolve. On the day that it had its likeness taken, the attic was temporarily transformed. At least a score of unappreciated masterpieces concealed the dilapidation of the walls; the broken window was decorated with an Eastern fabric that had been a cherished "property" of half the *ateliers* in Paris; the poet himself—with the palm contributed by the concierge drooping gracefully above his head—mused in a massive chair in which Solomon had been pronouncing judgment until 12.15, when the poet had called for it. The appearance of exhaustion observed by admirers of the poet's portrait was due to the chair's appalling weight. As he staggered under it up the steps of the Passage des Abbesses, the young man had feared he would expire on the threshold of his fame.

However, the photographer proved as resourceful as

could be desired, and perhaps the most striking feature of the illustration was the spaciousness of the apartment in which M. Tricotrin was presented to readers of *Le Demi-Mot.* The name of the thoroughfare was not obtruded.

With what pride was that issue of the journal regarded in the Rue des Trois Frères!

"Aha!" cried Tricotrin, who in moments persuaded himself that he really occupied such noble quarters, "those who repudiated me in the days of my struggles will be a little repentant now, hein? Stone Heart will discover that I was not wrong in relying on my genius!"

"I assume," said Pitou, "that 'Stone Heart' is your newest pet-name for the silk-manufacturing uncle?"

"You catch my meaning precisely. I propose to send a copy of the paper to Lyons, with the 'interview' artistically bordered by laurels; I cannot draw laurels myself, but there are plenty of people who can. We will find some one to do it when we palter with starvation at Le Faisan d'Or this evening—or perhaps we had better fast at Le Lapin Agile instead; there is generally some ink in the bottle there. I shall put the address in the margin—my uncle will not know where it is, and on the grounds of euphony I have no fault to find with it. It would not surprise me if I received an affectionate letter and a banknote in reply—the perversity of human nature delights in generosities to the prosperous."

"It is a fact," said Pitou. "That human nature!"

"Who knows?—he may even renew the allowance that he used to make me!"

"Upon my word, more unlikely things have happened," Pitou conceded.

"Mon Dieu, Nicolas, we shall again have enough to eat!"

"Ah, visionary!" exclaimed Pitou; "are there no bounds to your imagination?"

Now the perversity to which the poet referred did inspire M. Rigaud, of Lyons, to loosen his purse-strings. He wrote that he rejoiced to learn that Gustave was beginning to make his way, and enclosed a present of two hundred and fifty francs. More, after an avuncular preamble which the poet skipped—having a literary hatred of digressions in the work of others—he even hinted that the allowance might be resumed.

What a banquet there was in bohemia! How the glasses jingled afterwards in La Lune Rousse, and oh, the beautiful hats that Ivonne and Marcelle displayed in the Jardin des Buttes-Chaumont on the next fine Sunday! Even when the last ripples of the splash were stilled, the comrades swaggered gallantly on the Boulevard Rochechouart, for by any post might not the first instalment of that allowance arrive?

Weeks passed; and Tricotrin began to say, "It looks to me as if we needed another 'Interview'!"

And then came a letter which was no less cordial than its predecessor, but which crashed upon the humble attic like a bombshell from the Prussians. Monsieur Rigaud stated that business would bring him to Paris on the following evening, and that he anticipated the pleasure of visiting his nephew; he trusted that his dear Gustave would meet him at the station. The poet and composer stared at each other with bloodless faces.

"You must call at his hotel instead," faltered Pitou at last.

"But you may be sure he will wish to see my elegant abode."

"'It is in the hands of the decorators. How unfortunate!'"

"He would propose to offer them suggestions; he is a born suggester."

"'Fever is raging in the house—a most infectious fever'; we will ask a medical student to give us one."

"It would not explain my lodging in a slum meanwhile."

"Well, let us admit that there is nothing to be done; you will have to own up."

"Are you insane? It is improvident youths like you who come to lament their wasted lives. If I could receive him this once as he expects to be received, we cannot doubt that it would mean an income of two thousand francs to me. Prosperity dangles before us—shall I fail to clutch it? Mon Dieu, what a catastrophe, his coming to Paris! Why cannot he conduct his business in Lyons? Is there not enough money in the city of Lyons to satisfy him? O grasper! what greed! Nicolas, my more than brother, if it were night when I took him to a sumptuous apartment, he might not notice the name of the street—I could talk brilliantly as we turned the corner. Also I could scintillate as I led him away. He would never know that it was not the Rue des Trois Frères."

"You are right," agreed Pitou; "but which is the pauper in our social circle whose sumptuous apartment you propose to acquire?"

"One must consider," said Tricotrin. "Obviously, I am compelled to entertain in somebody's; fortunately,

I have two days to find it in. I shall now go forth!"

It was a genial morning, and the first person he accosted in the Rue Ravignan was Goujaud, painting in the patch of garden before the studios. "Tell me, Goujaud," exclaimed the poet, "have you any gilded acquaintance who would permit me the use of his apartment for two hours to-morrow evening?"

Goujaud reflected for some seconds, with his head to one side. "I have never done anything so fine as this before," he observed; "regard the atmosphere of it!"

"It is execrable!" replied Tricotrin, and went next door to Flamant. "My old one," he explained, "I have urgent need of a regal apartment for two hours to-morrow—have you a wealthy friend who would accommodate me?"

"You may beautify your bedroom with all my possessions," returned Flamant heartily. "I have a stuffed parrot that is most decorative, but I have not a friend that is wealthy."

"You express yourself like a First Course for the Foreigner," said Tricotrin, much annoyed; "devil take your stuffed parrot!"

The heat of the sun increased towards midday, and drops began to trickle under the young man's hat. By four o'clock he had called upon sixty-two persons, exclusive of Sanquereau, whom he had been unable to wake. He bethought himself of Lajeunie, the novelist; but Lajeunie could offer him nothing more serviceable than a pass for the Elysée-Montmartre. "Now how is it possible that I spend my life among such imbeciles?" groaned the unhappy poet; "one offers me a parrot,

and another a pass for a dancing-hall! Can I assure my uncle, who is a married man, and produces silk in vast quantities, that I reside in a dancing-hall? Besides, we know those passes—they are only available for ladies."

"It is true that you could not get in by it," assented Lajeunie, "but I give it to you freely. Take it, my poor fellow! Though it appears inadequate to the occasion, it may prove to be the turning-point in your fortunes."

"You are as mad as the stories you write," said Tricotrin; "still it can go in my pocket." And he made, exhausted, for a bench in the Place Dancourt, where he apostrophised his fate.

Thus occupied, he fell asleep, and presently a young woman sauntered from the sidewalk across the square. In the shady little Place Dancourt is the little white Théâtre Montmartre, and she first perused the play-bill, and then contemplated the sleeping poet. It may have been that she found something attractive in his bearing, or it may have been that ragamuffins sprawled elsewhere; but, having determined to wait a while, she selected the bench on which he reposed, and forthwith woke him.

"Now here is a nice thing!" he exclaimed, realising his lapse with a start.

"Oh, monsieur!" said she, blushing.

"Pardon; I referred to my having dozed when every moment is of consequence," he explained. "And yet," he went on ruefully, "upon my soul, I cannot conjecture where I shall go next!"

Her response was so sympathetic that it tempted him

to remain a little longer, and in five minutes she was recounting her own perplexities. It transpired that she was a lady's-maid with a holiday, and the problem before her was whether to spend her money on a theatre or on a ball.

"Now that is a question which is disposed of instantly," said Tricotrin. "You shall spend your money on a theatre, and go to a ball as well." And out fluttered the pink pass presented to him by Lajeunie.

The girl's tongue was as lively as her gratitude. She was, she told him, maid to the famous Colette Aubray, who had gone unattended that afternoon to visit the owner of a villa in the country, where she would stay until the next day but one. "So you see, monsieur, we poor servants are left alone in the flat to amuse ourselves as best we can!"

"Mon Dieu!" ejaculated Tricotrin, and added mentally, "It was decidedly the good, kind fairies that pointed to this bench!"

He proceeded to pay the young woman such ardent attentions that she assumed he meant to accompany her to the ball, and her disappointment was extreme when he had to own that the state of his finances forbade it. "All I can suggest, my dear Léonie," he concluded, "is that I shall be your escort when you leave. It is abominable that you must have other partners in the meantime, but I feel that you will be constant to me in your thoughts. I shall have much to tell you—I shall whisper a secret in your ear; for, incredible as it may sound, my sweet child, you alone in Paris have the power to save me."

"O monsieur!" faltered the admiring lady's-maid,

"it has always been my great ambition to save a young man, especially a young man who used such lovely language. I am sure, by the way you talk, that you must be a poet!"

"Extraordinary," mused Tricotrin, "that all the world recognises me as a poet, excepting when it reads my poetry!" And this led him to reflect that he must sell some of it, in order to provide refreshment for Léonie before he begged her aid. Accordingly, he arranged to meet her when the ball finished, and limped back to the attic, where he made up a choice assortment of his wares.

He had resolved to try the office of *Le Demi-Mot*, but his reception there was cold. "You should not presume on our good nature," demurred the editor; "only last month we had an article on you, saying that you were highly talented, and now you ask us to publish your work besides. There must be a limit to such things."

He examined the collection, nevertheless, with a depreciatory countenance, and offered ten francs for three of the finest specimens. "From *Le Demi-Mot* I would counsel you to accept such low terms," he said, with engaging interest, "on account of the prestige you derive from appearing in it."

"In truth it is a noble thing, prestige," admitted Tricotrin; "but, monsieur, I have never known a man able to make a meal of it when he was starving, or to warm himself before it when he was without a fire. Still—though it is a jumble-sale price—let them go!"

"Payment will be made in due course," said the editor, and became immersed in correspondence.

Tricotrin paled to the lips, and the next five minutes were terrible; indeed, he did not doubt that he would have to limp elsewhere. At last he cried, "Well, let us say seven francs, cash. Seven francs in the hand are worth ten in due course." And thus the bargain was concluded.

"It was well for Hercules that none of his labours was the extraction of payment from an editor!" panted the poet on the doorstep. But he was now enabled to fête the lady's-maid in grand style, and—not to be outdone in generosity—she placed Mdlle. Aubray's flat at his disposal directly he asked for it.

"You have accomplished a miracle!" averred Pitou, in the small hours, when he heard the news.

Tricotrin waved a careless gesture. "To a man of resource all things are possible," he murmured.

The next evening the silk manufacturer was warmly embraced on the platform, and not a little surprised to learn that his nephew expected a visit at once. However, the young man's consternation was so profound when objections were made that, in the end, they were withdrawn. Tricotrin directed the driver after Monsieur Rigaud was in the cab, and, on their reaching the courtyard, there was Léoni, all frills, ready to carry the handbag.

"Your servant?" inquired Monsieur Rigaud, with some disapproval, as they went upstairs; "she is rather fancifully dressed, hein?"

"Is it so?" answered Tricotrine. "Perhaps a bachelor is not sufficiently observant in these matters. Still she is an attentive domestic. Take off your things, my dear

uncle, and make yourself at home. What joy it gives me to see you here!"

"Mon Dieu," exclaimed the silk manufacturer, looking about him, "you have a place fit for a prince! It must have cost a pretty penny."

"Between ourselves," said Tricotrin, "I often reproach myself for what I spent on it; I could make very good use to-day of some of the money I squandered."

"What curtains!" murmured Monsieur Rigaud, fingering the silk enraptured. "The quality is superb! What may they have charged you for these curtains?"

"It was years ago—upon my word I do not remember," drawled Tricotrin, who had no idea whether he ought to say five hundred francs, or five thousand. "Also, you must not think I have bought everything you see—many of the pictures and bronzes are presents from admirers of my work. It is gratifying, hein?"

"I—I—— To confess the truth, we had not heard of your triumphs," admitted Monsieur Rigaud; "I did not dream you were so successful."

"Ah, it is in a very modest way," Tricotrin replied. "I am not a millionaire, I assure you! On the contrary, it is often difficult to make both ends meet—although," he added hurriedly, "I live with the utmost economy, my uncle! the days of my thoughtlesness are past. A man should save, a man should provide for the future!"

At this moment he was astonished to see Léonie open the door and announce that dinner was served. She had been even better than her word.

"Dinner?" cried Monsieur Rigaud. "Ah, now I

understand why you were so dejected when I would not come!"

"Bah, it will be a very simple meal," said his nephew, "but after a journey one must eat. Let us go in." He was turning the wrong way, but Léonie's eye saved him.

"Come," he proceeded, taking his seat, "some soup —some good soup! What will you drink, my uncle?"

"On the sideboard I see champagne," chuckled Monsieur Rigaud; "you treat the old man well, you rogue!"

"Hah," said Tricotrin, who had not observed it, "the cellar, I own, is an extravagance of mine! Alone, I drink only Perrier, or a little weak claret and water; but to my dearest friends I must give the dearest wines. Léonie, champagne!"

It was a capital dinner, and the cigars and cigarettes that Léonie put on the table with the coffee were of the highest excellence. Agreeable conversation whiled away some hours, and Tricotrin began to look for his uncle to get up, but it was raining smartly, and Monsieur Rigaud was reluctant to bestir himself. Another hour lagged by, and at last Tricotrin faltered:

"I fear I must beg you to excuse me for leaving you, my uncle; it is most annoying, but I am compelled to go out. The fact is, I have consented to collaborate with Capus, and he is so eccentric, this dear Alfred— we shall be at work all night."

"Go, my good Gustave," said his uncle readily; "and, as I am very tired, if you have no objection, I will occupy your bed."

Tricotrin's jaw dropped, and it was by a supreme

effort that he stammered how pleased the arrangement would make him. To intensify the fix, Léonie and the cook had disappeared—doubtless to the *mansarde* in which they slept—and he was left to cope with the catastrophe alone. However, having switched on the lights, he conducted the elderly gentleman to an enticing apartment. He wished him an affectionate "good-night," and after promising to wake him early, made for home, leaving the manufacturer sleepily surveying the room's imperial splendour.

"What magnificence!" soliloquised Monsieur Rigaud. "What toilet articles!" He got into bed. "What a coverlet—there must be twenty thousand francs on top of me!"

He had not slumbered under them long when he was arroused by such a commotion that he feared for the action of his heart. Blinking in the glare, he perceived Léonie in scanty attire, distracted on her knees—and, by the bedside, a beautiful lady in a travelling cloak, raging with the air of a lioness.

"Go away!" quavered the manufacturer. "What is the meaning of this intrusion?"

"Intrusion?" raved the lady. "That is what you will explain, monsieur! How comes it that you are in my bed?"

"Yours?" ejaculated Monsieur Rigaud. "What is it you say? You are making a grave error, for which you will apologise, madame."

"Oh, hold me back," pleaded the lady, throwing up her eyes, "hold me back or I shall assault him!" She flung to Léonie. "Wretched girl, you shall pay for this! Not content with lavishing my champagne and

my friend's cigars on your lover, you must put him to recuperate in my room!"

"Oh!" gasped the manufacturer, and hid his head under the priceless coverlet. "Such an imputation is unpardonable," he roared, reappearing. "I am Monsieur Rigaud, of Lyons; I am in the flat of my nephew, Monsieur Tricotrin; I request you to retire!"

"Imbecile!" screamed the lady; "you are in the flat of *me*—Colette Aubray. And your presence may ruin me—I expect a visitor on most important business! He has not my self-control; if he finds you here he will most certainly send you a challenge. He is the best swordsman in Paris! I advise you to believe me, for you have just five minutes to save your life!"

"Monsieur," wailed Léonie, "you have been deceived!" And, between her sobs, she confessed the circumstances, which he heard with the greatest difficulty, owing to the chattering of his teeth.

The rain was descending in cataracts when Monsieur Rigaud got outside, but though the trams and the trains had both stopped running, and cabs were as dear as radium, his fury was so tempestuous that nothing could deter him from reaching the poet's real abode. His attack on the front door warned Tricotrin and Pitou what had happened, and they raised themselves, blanched from their pillows, to receive his curses. It was impossible to reason with him, and he launched the most frightful denunciations at his nephew for an hour, when the abatement of the downpour permitted him to depart. More! At noon, who should arrive but Léonie in tears? She had been dismissed from her employment, and came to beg the poet to intercede for her.

"What calamities!" groaned Tricotrin. "How fruitless are man's noblest endeavours without the favouring breeze! I shall drown myself at eight o'clock. However, I will readily plead for you first, if your mistress will receive me."

By the maid's advice, he presented himself late in the day, and when he had cooled his heels in the salon for some time, a lady entered, who was of such ravishing appearance that his head swam.

"Monsieur Tricotrin?" she inquired haughtily. "I have heard your name from your uncle, monsieur. Are you here to visit my servant?"

"Mademoiselle," he faltered, "I am here to throw myself on your mercy. At eight o'clock I have decided to commit suicide, for I am ruined. The only hope left me is to win your pardon before I die."

"I suppose your uncle has disowned you?" she said. "Naturally! It was a pretty situation to put him in—how would you care to be in it yourself!"

"Alas, mademoiselle," sighed Tricotrin, "there are situations to which a poor poet may not aspire!"

After regarding him silently, she exclaimed, "I cannot understand what a boy with eyes like yours saw in Léonie?"

"Merely good nature and a means to an end, believe me! If you would ease my last moments, reinstate her in your service. Do not let me drown with the knowledge that another is suffering for my fault! Mademoiselle, I entreat you—take her back!"

"And why should I ease your last moments?" she demurred.

"Because I have no right to ask it; because I have

no defence for my sin towards you; because you would be justified in trampling on me—and to pardon would be sublime!"

"You are very eloquent for my maid," returned the lady.

He shook his head. "Oh, no—I fear I am pleading for myself. For, if you reinstate the girl, it will prove that you forgive the man—and I want your forgiveness so much!" He fell at her feet.

"Does your engagement for eight o'clock press, monsieur?" murmured the lady, smiling. "If you could dine here again to-night, I might relent by degrees."

"And she is adorable!" he told Pitou. "I passed the most delicious evening of my life!"

"It is fortunate," observed Pitou, "for that, and your uncle's undying enmity, are all you have obtained by your imposture. Remember that the evening cost two thousand francs a year!"

"Ah, misanthrope," cried Tricotrin radiantly, "there must be a crumpled roseleaf in every Eden!"

VIII

THE INFIDELITY OF MONSIEUR NOULENS

WHENEVER they talk of him, whom I will call "Noulens"—of his novels, his method, the eccentricities of his talent—some one is sure to say, "But what comrades, he and his wife! They are devoted to each other!" You are certain to hear it; and as often as I hear it myself, I think of what he told me that evening—I remember the shock I had.

At the beginning, I had expected little. When I went in, his wife said, "I fear he will be poor company; he has to write a short story for *La Voix*, and cannot find a theme—he has been beating his brains all day." So far from anticipating emotions, I had proposed dining there another night instead, but she would not allow me to leave. "Something you say may suggest a motif to him," she declared, "and he can write or dictate the story in an hour, when you have gone."

So I stayed, and after dinner he lay on the sofa, bewailing the fate that had made him an author. The salon communicated with the study, and through the

open door he had the invitation of his writing-table—the little sheaf of paper that she had put in readiness for him, the lighted lamp, the pile of cigarettes. I knew that she hoped the view would stimulate him, but it was soon apparent that he had ceased to think of a story altogether. He spoke of Antoine in his new part, of a book by Anatole France, of the revue at Parisiana. Then, in the hall, the telephone bell rang, and Madame rose to receive the message. "Allô! Allô!"

She did not come back. There was a pause, and presently he murmured:

"I wonder if a stranger has been moved to telephone a plot to me!"

"What?" I said.

"It sounds mad, hein? But it once happened—on just such a night as this, when my mind was just as blank. Really! Out of the silence a woman told me a beautiful story. Of course, I never used it, nor do I know if she made use of it herself; but I have never forgotten. For years I could not hear a telephone bell without trembling. Even now, when I am working late, I find myself hoping for her voice."

"The story was so wonderful as that?"

He threw a glance into the study, as if to assure himself that his wife had not entered it from the hall.

"Can you believe that a man may learn to love—tenderly and truly love—a woman he has never met?" he asked me.

"I don't think I understand you."

"There has been only one woman in my life who was all in all to me," he said, "and I never saw her."

How was I to answer? I looked at him.

"After all, what is there incredible in it?" he demanded. "Do we give our love to a face, or to a temperament? I swear to you that I could not have known that woman's temperament more intimately if we had made our confidences in each other's arms. I knew everything of her, except the trifles which a stranger learns in the moment of being presented—her height, her complexion, her name, whether she was married or single. No, those things I never knew. But her tastes, her sympathies, her soul, these, the secret truths of the woman, were as familiar to me as to herself."

He hesitated.

"I am in a difficulty. If I seem to disparage my wife, I shall be a cad; if I let you think we have been as happy together as people imagine, you will not understand the importance of what I am going to tell you. I will say this: before our honeymoon was over, I bored her fearfully. While we were engaged, I had talked to her of my illusions about herself; when we were married, I talked to her of my convictions about my art. The change appalled her. She was chilled, crushed, dumfounded. I looked to her to share my interests. For response, she yawned—and wept.

"Oh, her tears! her hourly tears! the tears that drowned my love!

"The philosopher is made, not born; in the first few years I rebelled furiously. I wanted a companion, a confidante, and I had never felt so desperately alone.

"We had a flat in the Rue de Sontay then, and the telephone was in my work-room. One night late, as I

sat brooding there, the bell startled me; and a voice—a woman's voice, said:

"'I am so lonely; I want to talk to you before I sleep.'

"I cannot describe the strangeness of that appeal, reaching me so suddenly out of the distance. I knew that it was a mistake, of course, but it was as if, away in the city, some nameless soul had echoed the cry in my own heart. I obeyed an impulse; I said:

"'I, too, am very lonely—I believe I have been waiting for you.'

"There was a pause, and then she asked, dismayed:

"'Who are you?'

"'Not the man you thought,' I told her. 'But a very wistful one.'

"I heard soft laughter. 'How absurd!' she murmured.

"'Be merciful,' I went on; 'we are both sad, and Fate clearly intends us to console each other. It cannot compromise you, for I do not even know who you are. Stay and talk to me for five minutes.'

"'What do you ask me to talk about?'

"'Oh, the subject to interest us both—yourself.'

"After a moment she answered, 'I am shaking my head.'

"'It is very unfeeling of you,' I said. 'And I have not even the compensation of seeing you do it.'

"Imagine another pause, and then her voice in my ear again:

"'I will tell you what I can do for you—I can tell you a story.'

"'The truth would please me more,' I owned. 'Still,

if my choice must be made between your story and your silence, certainly I choose the story.'

"'I applaud your taste,' she said. 'Are you comfortable—are you sitting down?'

"I sat down smiling; 'Madame——'

"She did not reply.

"Then, 'Mademoiselle——'

"Again no answer.

"'Well, say at least if I have your permission to smoke while I listen to you?'

"She laughed; 'You carry courtesy far!'

"'How far?' I asked quickly.

"But she would not even hint from what neighbourhood she was speaking to me. 'Attend!' she commanded—and began:

"'It is a story of two lovers,' she said, 'Paul and Rosamonde. They were to have married, but Rosamonde died too soon. When she was dying, she gave him a curl of the beautiful brown hair that he used to kiss. "Au revoir, dear love," she whispered; "it will be very stupid in Heaven until you come. Remember that I am waiting for you and be faithful. If your love for me fades, you will see that curl of mine fade too."

"'Every day through the winter Paul strewed flowers on her tomb, and sobbed. And in the spring he strewed flowers and sighed. And in the summer he paid that flowers might be strewn there for him. Sometimes, when he looked at the dead girl's hair, he thought that it was paler than it had been, but, as he looked at it seldom now, he could easily persuade himself that he was mistaken.

"'Then he met a woman who made him happy

again; and the wind chased the withered flowers from Rosamonde's grave, and left it bare. One day Paul's wife found a little packet that lay forgotten in his desk; she opened it jealously, before he could prevent her. Paul feared that the sight would give her pain, and watched her with anxious eyes. But in a moment she was laughing. "What an idiot I am!" she exclaimed. "I was afraid that it was the hair of some girl you had loved!" The curl was snow-white.'

"Her fantastic tale," continued Noulens, "which was told with an earnestness that I cannot reproduce, impressed me very much. I did not offer any criticism, I did not pay her any compliment; I said simply:

"'Who are you?'

"'That,' she warned me, 'is a question that you must not ask. Well, are you still bored?'

"'No.'

"'A little interested?'

"'Very.'

"'I, too, am feeling happier than I did. And now, adieu!'

"'Wait,' I begged. 'Tell me when I shall speak to you again.'

"She hesitated; and I assure you that I had never waited for a woman's answer with more suspense while I held her hand, than I waited for the answer of this woman whom I could not see. 'To-morrow?' I urged. 'In the morning?'

"'In the morning it would be difficult.'

"'The afternoon?'

"'In the afternoon it would be impossible.'

"'Then the evening—at the same hour?'

"'Perhaps,' she faltered, 'if I am free.'

"'My number,' I told her, 'is five-five-two-nought-nine. Can you write it now?'

"'I have written it.'

"'Please repeat, so that there may be no mistake.'

"'Five-five-two-nought-nine. Correct?'

"'Correct. I am grateful.'

"'Good-night.'

"'Good-night. Sleep well.'

"You may suppose that on the morrow I remembered the incident with a smile, that I ridiculed the emotion it had roused in me? You would be wrong. I recalled it more and more curiously; I found myself looking forward to the appointment with an eagerness that was astonishing. We had talked for about twenty minutes, hidden from each other—half Paris, perhaps, dividing us; I had nothing more tangible to expect this evening. Yet I experienced all the sensations of a man who waits for an interview, for an embrace. What did it mean? I was bewildered. The possibility of love at first sight I understood; but might the spirit also recognise an affinity by telephone?

"There is a phrase in feuilletons that had always irritated me—'To his impatience it seemed that the clock had stopped.' It had always struck me as absurd. Since that evening I have never condemned the phrase, for honestly, I thought more than once that the clock had stopped. By and by, to increase the tension, my wife, who seldom entered my work-room, opened the door. She found me idle, and was moved to converse with me. Mon Dieu! Now that the hour approached

at last, Madame was present, with the air of having settled herself for the night!

"The hands of the clock moved on—and always faster now. If she remained till the bell rang, what was I to do? To answer that I had 'some one with me' would be intelligible to the lady, but it would sound suspicious to my wife. To answer that I was 'busy' would sound innocent to my wife, but it would be insulting to the lady. To disregard the bell altogether would be to let Madame go to the telephone herself! I tell you I perspired.

"Under Providence, our cook rescued me. There came a timid knock, and then the figure of the cook, her eyes inflamed, her head swathed in some extraordinary garment. She had a raging toothache—would Madame have the kindness to give her a little cognac? The ailments of the cook always arouse in human nature more solicitude than the ailments of any other servant. Madame's sympathy was active—I was saved!

"The door had scarcely closed when *tr-rr-r-ng* the signal came.

"'Good evening,' from the voice. 'So you are here to meet me.'

"'Good evening,' I said. 'I would willingly go further to meet you.'

"'Be thankful that the rendezvous was your flat—listen to the rain! Come, own that you congratulated yourself when it began! "Luckily, I can be gallant without getting wet," you thought. Really I am most considerate—you keep a dry skin, you waste no time in reaching me, and you need not even trouble to change your coat.'

"'It sounds very cosy,' I admitted; 'but there is one drawback to it all—I do not see you.'

"'That may be more considerate of me still! I may be reluctant to banish your illusions. Isn't it probable that I am plain—or, at least, elderly? I may even be an authoress, with ink on her fingers. By the bye, monsieur, I have been re-reading one of your books since last night.'

"'Oh, you know my name now? I am gratified to have become more than a telephonic address to you. May I ask if we have ever met?'

"'We never spoke till last night, but I have seen you often.'

"'You, at any rate, can have no illusions to be banished. What a relief! I have endeavoured to talk as if I had a romantic bearing; now that you know how I look, I can be myself.'

"'I await your next words with terror,' she said. 'What shock is in store for me? Speak gently.'

"'Well, speaking gently, I am very glad that you were put on to the wrong number last night. At the same time, I feel a constraint, a difficulty; I cannot talk to you frankly, cannot be serious—it is as if I showed my face while you were masked.'

"'Yes, it is true—I understand,' she said. 'And even if I were to swear that I was not unworthy of your frankness, you would still be doubtful of me, I suppose.'

"'Madame——'

"'Oh, it is natural! I know very well how I must appear to you,' she exclaimed; 'a coquette, with a new pastime—a vulgar coquette, besides, who tries to pique

your interest by an air of mystery. Believe me, monsieur, I am forbidden to unmask. Think lightly of me if you must—I have no right to complain—but believe as much as that. I do not give you my name, simply because I may not.'

"'Madame,' I replied, 'so far from wishing to force your confidence, I assure you that I will never inquire who you are, never try to find out.'

"'And you will talk frankly, unconstrainedly, all the same?'

"'Ah, you are too illogical to be elderly and plain,' I demurred. 'You resolve to remain a stranger to me—and I bow to your decision—but, on the other hand, a man makes confidences only to his friends.'

"There was a long pause; and when I heard the voice again, it trembled:

"'Adieu, monsieur.'

"'Adieu, madame,' I said.

"No sooner had she gone, than I would have given almost anything to bring her back. For a long while I sat praying that she would ring again. I watched the telephone as if it had been her window, the door of her home—something that could yield her to my view. During the next few days I grudged every minute that I was absent from the room. I took my meals in it. Never had I had the air of working so indefatigably, and in truth I did not write a line. 'I suppose you have begun a new romance?' said my wife. In my soul I feared that I had finished it!"

Noulens sighed; he clasped his hands on his head. The dark hair, the thin, restless fingers were all that I could see of him where I sat. Some seconds passed; I

wondered whether there would be time for me to hear the rest before his wife returned.

"In my soul I feared that I had finished it," he repeated. "Extraordinary as it appears, I was in love with a woman I had never seen. Each time that bell sounded, my heart seemed to try to choke me. It had been my grievance, since we had the telephone installed, that we heard nothing of it excepting that we owed another cheque for its use; but now, by a maddening coincidence, everybody I had ever met took to ringing me up about trifles, and agitating me twenty times a day.

"At last, one night—when expectation was almost dead—she called to me again. Oh, but her voice was humble! My friend, it is piteous when we love a woman, to hear her humbled. I longed to take her hands, to fold my arms about her. I abased myself, that she might regain her pride. She heard how I had missed and sorrowed for her; I owned that she was dear to me.

"And then began a companionship—strange as you may find the word—which was the sweetest my life has held. We talked together daily. This woman, whose whereabouts, whose face, whose name were all unknown to me, became the confidante of my disappointments and my hopes. If I worked well, my thought would be, 'To-night I shall have good news to give her;' if I worked ill—'Never mind, by and by she will encourage me!' There was not a page in my next novel that I did not read to her; never a doubt beset me in which I did not turn for her sympathy and advice.

"'Well, how have you got on?'

"'Oh, I am so troubled this evening, dear!'

"'Poor fellow! Tell me all about it. I tried to come to you sooner, but I couldn't get away.'

"Like that! We talked as if she were really with me. My life was no longer desolate; the indifference in my home no longer grieved me. All the interest, the love, the inspiration I had hungered for, was now given to me by a woman who remained invisible."

Noulens paused again. In the pause I got up to light a cigarette, and—I shall never forget it! I saw the bowed figure of his wife beyond the study door. It was only a glimpse I had, but the glimpse was enough to make my heart stand still—she leant over the table, her face hidden by her hand.

I tried to warn, to signal to him—he did not see me. I felt that I could do nothing—nothing at all—without doubling her humiliation by the knowledge that I had witnessed it. If he would only look at me!

"Listen," he went on rapidly. "I was happy I was young again—and there was a night when she said to me, 'It is for the last time.'

"Six words! But for a moment I had no breath, no life, to answer them.

"'Speak!' she cried out. 'You are frightening me!'

"'What has happened?' I stammered. 'Trust me, I implore you!'

"I heard her sobbing—and minutes seemed to pass. It was horrible. I thought my heart would burst while I shuddered at her sobs—the sobbing of a woman I could not reach.

"'I can tell you nothing,' she said, when she was

calmer; 'only that we are speaking together for the last time.'

"'But why—why? Is it that you are leaving France?'

"'I cannot tell you,' she repeated. 'I have had to swear that to myself.'

"Oh, I raved to her! I was desperate. I tried to wring her name from her then—I besought her to confess where she was hidden. The space between us frenzied me. It was frightful, it was like a nightmare, that struggle to tear the truth from a woman whom I could not clasp or see.

"'My dear,' she said, 'there are some things that are beyond human power. They are not merely difficult, or unwise, or mad—they are impossible. *You* have begged the impossible of *me*. You will never hear me again, it is far from likely we shall ever meet—and if one day we do, you will not even know that it is I. But I love you. I should like to think that you believe it, for I love you very dearly. Now say "good-bye" to me. My arms are round your neck, dear heart—I kiss you on the lips.'

"It was the end. She was lost. A moment before, I had felt her presence in my senses; now I stood in an empty room, mocked by a futile apparatus. My friend, if you have ever yearned to see a woman whose whereabouts you did not know—ever exhausted yourself tramping some district in the hope of finding her—you may realise what I feel; for remember that by comparison your task was easy—I am even ignorant of this woman's arrondissement and appearance. She left me helpless. The telephone had given her—the telephone

had taken her away. All that remained to me was the mechanism on a table."

Noulens turned on the couch at last; and, turning, he could not fail to see his wife. I was spellbound.

"'Mechanism on a table,' he repeated, with a prodigious yawn of relief. "That is all. If thou hast written it, my own, the story is finished!"

"Good!" said Madame cheerily. She bustled in, fluttering pages of shorthand. "But I complain, old angel, that the tale of Paul and Rosamonde is thrown away—it is an extravagance, telling two tales for the price of one."

"You are right, my soul. But, on the other hand, thou knowest that I invented it months ago, and could not make it long enough for it to be of any use."

"That is true," she agreed. "Well, we will be liberal, then—we will include it!" She noticed my amazement. "What ails monsieur?"

Noulens gave a guffaw. "I am afraid monsieur did not recognise that I was dictating to you," he chuckled. "By the bye, it was fortunate that some one telephoned to us just now—that started my plot for me! Who was it?"

"It was *La Voix*," she laughed, "inquiring if the story would be done in time!"

Oh yes, indeed, they are comrades, those two—you are certain to hear it! And as often as I hear it myself, I think of what he told me that evening—I remember how he took me in.

IX

THE FAVOURITE PLOT (WITH VARIATIONS)

THE financier was cracking walnuts when the curate arrived.

"Hallo, boy!" he said. "Why didn't you come to dinner?"

"How do you do, Uncle Murray? Oh, it was impossible to come in time for dinner. I had a Meeting at six o'clock—and it's a long way from Plaistow to Park Lane. Are you quite well?"

"Pretty fit," said Murray Pybus. "Glad to see you again. I was going to drop you a line. I go to New York next month. Help yourself to port."

"Thank you, I don't drink wine," said Cuthbert, a shade reproachfully.

"I forgot," said Pybus. "Cigar? But you don't smoke either! Well, take an armchair; make yourself comfortable. How's Plaistow?"

The curate cleared his throat. "I was anxious to have a talk with you, Uncle Murray, on a very important subject."

"So you wrote me. Well, I know your important

subjects; you needn't go into details; of course it's a *bonâ fide* case. How much do you want?"

"Frankly, I am nervous," faltered his nephew.

"Better try the port," counselled Pybus. "No? All right; stick to your colours, even if they're a blue ribbon."

"You have always been so generous—more than generous. Your subscriptions, and—and your proposals as regards myself, though I couldn't accept them, were——"

"Natural enough! You'll have to have the lot one day—I've nobody else to leave it to, and I'm not the man to marry again." He laughed. "It'll be a funny position, eh—an East End curate blooming into a millionaire? You're a queer fish, Cuthbert! I don't say any more about your not coming into the City—you weren't cut out for it—but what do you want to starve in the slums for? If the Church was the only thing to suit you, you might as well have had a snug berth in it."

"I thought—at least I hoped—" said Cuthbert stiffly, "that I had made my principles clear to you long ago. I have no desire for a 'snug berth'; I told you so when the Call came to me. My object in taking orders was never to attain material comforts; if I had sought worldly advantages, I should have embraced a commercial career instead. I choose to labour among those who need my poor help the most; and I choose to be in truth their brother—not to hold myself aloof from them, a preceptor in a pleasaunce."

"Oh, very proper, very high-minded!" said the financier hurriedly; "a reputation for conscientiousness, of course,

is a valuable asset. Have it your own way, my lad. If I'm not to do anything for you in my lifetime, we'll say no more about it."

The curate flushed.

"As a matter of fact," he stammered, "my reason for wishing to see you was to beg you to do something for me. My principles are quite unchanged; I still mean to work among the poor, I'm still resolved to abstain from living among them luxuriously, but—well, circumstances have arisen which—er—— Perhaps I had better tell you everything, as it happened."

"Best way," said Pybus, repressing a groan.

"I was rather seriously unwell some weeks ago, and my Vicar induced me to take a brief holiday. He is always most considerate."

"Any family at the Vicarage?"

"Family? There are his three daughters."

"Ah," murmured the millionaire. "Yes, he would consider you attentively. Go on."

"Some quiet seaside place was preferable, and I went to Eastbourne."

"A person in delicate health is very likely to contract consumption there—Eastbourne is a public spittoon."

"The local masses are exceptionally dangerous and disgusting, it's true. They are not to blame—they have no one there to teach them better. Well, my lodgings were not cheerful, and the weather was unpropitious, so altogether——"

"You got the hump?"

"I was—er—rather—yes. One evening, as it was too wet to take a walk, I attended a performance of *A Crown of Thorns*. Of course, I had heard about it

—I knew that it had been approved by organs of the Press that don't mention such things as a rule—but I confess that it amazed me. I found its religious teaching quite as admirable as the historical instruction it afforded—the insight into the life of ancient Rome. It was practically my first visit to a theatre, and a most memorable experience. Perhaps you know the play?"

"Girl holds up a cross in the limelight, and the lions are afraid to eat her?"

"No, sir, there are no lions. There are lions in the pictorial advertisements of the play, but they are not actually visible on the stage. It isn't too much to say that I was 'overwhelmed.' I was ashamed of the unreasoning prejudice I had always entertained against theatrical performances."

"You haven't come to ask me to endow a theatre, I hope?" put in the millionaire genially.

"Oh, indeed, not at all, sir—the idea had not presented itself to me. Hear me out! The part of the heroine was taken by a lady who possessed such spiritual fervour that, at first, I regretted her choice of a career. How true it is that prejudice dies hard! I grieved—it was narrow of me!—that she was not devoting herself to the propagation of faith among the heathen of our own time, instead of to the mimic—er—I mean that it seemed to me she was wasting her precious gifts, that she ought to have been a missionary."

"I quite follow you," said Pybus dryly.

"I did not recognise the truth at once; but then it came to me—I understood! As I looked round at the eyes wet with tears, I saw that the stage may make for good as powerfully as the pulpit; I saw that this beauti-

ful girl, uttering the grace that was in her to hundreds nightly—I don't know if I mentioned that she has been favoured with remarkable beauty—was stirring the minds of mere pleasure-seekers to the contemplation of higher things; I saw that she was working in the same Cause as myself."

"Great Scott, boy, you've fallen in love with an actress!" exclaimed Pybus. "So that's it?"

"Later I certainly learnt to love her," replied the curate with dignity, "though I don't perceive by what process you have arrived at the fact. I had the happiness to meet her the next afternoon—in the waiting-room at a dentist's—and the passing of a magazine led to conversation."

"Did you tell her that you thought she ought to have been a missionary?"

"I believe I did say something of my earlier regret; and she agreed with me that she was doing equally exalted work on the stage. Perhaps my enlightenment may be partly due to that conversation; her thoughts on the subject were very beautiful. One answer that she made impressed me deeply; 'Religion and Art,' she said, 'are in reality the same thing.' . . . Without the context it is not so forcible, but when she said it, it was a perfect expression of what we meant, it was most illuminative."

"How much have you been muddling yourself up with this girl?" asked the financier curtly.

"Sir?"

"I say, how far has it gone? What happened after she illuminated the dentist's?"

"We met often after the dentist's—on the Parade.

We used to listen to the town crier together; she found a town crier so quaint; anything that savours of a bygone age appeals to her strongly. Fortunately, too, the Company was going to London—to various theatres in the suburbs—so I was able to see her when I returned, and—and she has consented to be my wife."

"You told her you were my nephew, eh—my heir?"

"I saw no reason for reticence. I trust you have not formed a poor opinion of a lady whom you have never seen?"

"Not at all; I should have a poor opinion of her if she'd refused you under the circumstances. But you're making yourself ridiculous. You've lost your head over an actress; you've taken a queer, clerical way about it, but you've lost your head over an actress. It won't do, Cuthbert, the thing's absurd!"

Cuthbert had turned very pale.

"I'm sorry to find you so unjust," he groaned. "I had hoped, in view of the many offers you have so kindly made me, that you'd be willing to—to further my happiness. Marriage upon my stipend is impossible, as you know. I trusted to your affection to—to—— Why, you've pressed me to take an allowance over and over again!"

"Look here, boy," exclaimed Pybus, "I'm going to talk straight to you! You're the nearest relative I've got, and though you were never the sort I was keen on leaving a million to, I knew you'd waste it in a creditable and conscientious kind of way. Also I'm only fifty, and I hoped you'd have got more sense by the time I died. But this alters matters. I shouldn't leave my money to you if you made a ridiculous marriage,

and I don't part with a quid to help you to do it. That's plain English. You can tell her what I've said when you keep the appointment at the stage-door to-night! She can marry you if she likes, but she'll live in Plaistow on what you've got now—there'll be nothing from me."

"And you," observed Cuthbert bitterly, "are called 'a man of the world'! Why, sir, you are displaying all the narrowness of the least sophisticated. She is an actress—and so to wed her must be misfortune! She is an actress——"

"And you're a fool!" said Pybus. "But I don't want to quarrel with you—I've been there myself—thirty years ago—we've all been there some time. You go to a theatre, you see a pretty woman, and you think you're in love. You're a curate, so your symptoms are a bit complicated, but the complaint's very usual, Cuthbert, believe me—it won't be fatal."

"Will you allow me to introduce her to you?" pleaded Cuthbert. "Will you give me a chance of overcoming your prejudices?"

"No, I won't; I haven't any prejudices. I dare say the girl's right enough—for the right man; but she's a long way from right for you. You don't really suppose she can care about you? You're a good lad, but the last fellow in the world to please an actress. If you hadn't told her you were my nephew, she'd have laughed in your face when you proposed to her."

"I am prepared," said the curate resignedly, "to suffer humiliation if need be."

"Oh, well, I don't want to hurt your feelings. But—er—well, she *would!* I know what actresses are like."

"But you don't know *her*. If you would talk to her

once, she would convert you; you would own you were wrong. My life's happiness is at stake. Before you decide, let me bring her to see you. Surely it is no more than fair?"

Pybus picked up the evening papers. "It's no good going on with it; that's all I've got to say!"

He opened the *Pall Mall*.

"Good-night, sir," quavered the curate, extending a hopeless hand.

"Good-night, boy," said the financier cordially. "Whenever you want anything in reason let me know."

Cuthbert took a 'bus to Victoria, and arrived at the Shakespeare, Clapham, in ample time. It was still embarrassing to him to loiter at a stage-door; but a man is justified in meeting his fiancée anywhere. He endeavoured to assert this by his bearing when loafers stared at him. Nobody was ever quite so high-minded as Cuthbert tried to look when he waited at stage-doors.

"My own, I have failed," he told her, as they walked to Clapham Junction.

The hand on his arm trembled. "What did he say?"

"He was obdurate; he refused point blank. Why should I pain you by repeating the insults I had to bear?"

"Just because I am an actress!" exclaimed the girl pathetically. "Oh, what we have to put up with, we artists; how uncharitable they are to us! . . . Then it's all over between you and I?"

He winced. But tears were swimming in her lovely eyes; it would have been heartless to mention grammar.

"I cannot lose you," he cried, "I cannot! We might

—no, it's out of the question. What's to be done? Angela, I almost lose faith!"

"Hush," she murmured, looking upward; "it may be all for the best, dear—it must be—though it is hard for us to understand it. . . . Do you think he would relent when we were married?"

"I fear not—he would never know you. If he'd let me take you to him, we should succeed, I'm sure—your intelligence and beauty would win him over, though he wouldn't appreciate your soul—but he declined to see you."

"It's a pity I can't be introduced to him as somebody else—go there as a hospital nurse or something. Then when I'd got round him, and he was very grateful to me, I could say, 'my name is Angela Noble—I love your nephew!'"

"It is a sweet idea. But his health is robust, and, besides, he goes abroad very soon."

"That's what *I* shall have to do," she said moodily.

"You?"

"If we don't marry, I must take the engagement for New York; you know I have the offer open—I shall have to close with it."

"New York!" cried Cuthbert. "I hoped you had dismissed the notion." He was meditative. "Angela, I have a daring thought! I will *not* fail!"

Pybus was considerably surprised a day or two later at receiving a pleasant letter from the young man wishing him an agreeable voyage, and inquiring by what boat he was to cross; he was considerably irritated at receiving a second letter reminding him of his permission to ask reasonable favours. A lady of the curate's

acquaintance was "departing for America, unprotected, by that very vessel." Any act of courtesy that Mr. Pybus would kindly show to the friendless lady, his affectionate nephew would much appreciate. It was added tactfully that, her means precluding speculation, no fear need be entertained of her angling for tips.

Pybus swore, and dictated a gracious note.

And the boat sailed.

Miss Noble unpacked her cabin trunk with the painful consciousness that steamers travelled fast. When she made the chance remark that had inspired her lover, she had been thinking vaguely of a sick-room and plenty of time for womanly gentleness to be admired. "Between Acts II. and III. a month elapses." An Atlantic racer was alarmingly different.

And the uncle was more discouraging still. Every uncle she had ever known refusing his consent had a white moustache and side whiskers, and was slightly bowed with age and cynicism. Here was a hale and hearty uncle, carelessly good-humoured. Such a person seemed less likely to break up into slushy sentiment than the iciest cynic that never sneered. The report that reached Plaistow from Queenstown was not a sanguine one. "There's just this in our favour," she had scribbled; "he has no suspicion who I am, and he can't escape me without jumping overboard. You may bet——" "Bet" had been imperfectly erased—"feel sure I shall do as much in the time as I can. Dear one——" Cuthbert kissed the ship's stationery with enthusiasm.

She was a bright girl—she hasn't been seen to advantage with the curate—and she was working for by far the most profitable engagement of her career; be-

fore the first sweepstake on the run she began to play her part in quite another manner than the one she had mentally rehearsed. The spiritual note that Cuthbert had expected of her—to go on being the heroine of *A Crown of Thorns* after the curtain was down—wouldn't catch on here at all, she decided; there was no hit to be made on those lines. Admiration, a wide-eyed homage of the financier's cleverness? Probably all the women he met looked at him like that—it had been played out long ago. The smartest thing would be to treat the middle-aged magnate as if he were an amusing young man.

She did it. It was much easier than being soulful, much less fatiguing. She laughed, she chaffed, she even flirted with him a little. Pybus, who had been prepared to find her a consummate nuisance, hadn't been on such good terms with himself for years.

The day before they sighted Sandy Hook he said, "I hope I shall see something of you after we land? Are you staying in New York long?"

"I—I hardly know," she answered. "It depends." It depended how he took it when she sprung the truth on him directly; she felt less self-possessed than usual.

"Anyhow, there's my address. If there's anything I can do, let me know."

"That's very kind of you! I wonder how much you mean it?" She flashed a glance. "I might ask for something big."

"Ah, I didn't pledge myself to do anything you asked; I said I'd like to do anything I could."

"Cautious person!" They were pacing the deck, and

they walked in silence for a minute. She was wondering if it would be discreet to delay her confession till they had arrived.

"You're nervy to-day," said Pybus. "You look as if you were going to say you had a headache. It's just the moment for a glass of champagne and a cracker. Let's go below and get them."

"I don't think I care about it, thanks; but you're quite right—I'm nervy. I want to tell you something. Shall we sit down?"

They sat down, and again there was silence.

"Well?" he questioned.

"I don't know how to begin."

"Let me help you," suggested Pybus. "Pull me up if I'm wrong. You are an actress; my nephew Cuthbert thinks he is in love with you; and you came aboard in the hope of persuading me to agree to your marriage. Whether you were going to New York, anyhow, I don't know; I trust you were, for I should be sorry to have put you to so much inconvenience. Now the beginning is over—proceed!"

Miss Noble had uttered a faint exclamation of astonishment; she stared blankly at the sea.

"You seem surprised," he said. "That isn't flattering to my intelligence. Cuthbert's circle of pretty women is strictly limited, I take it—any doubt I had of your identity when I got his letter was removed the moment I saw you."

"Oh, then you do think I'm pretty?" faltered Miss Noble.

"You are not a beauty, but your face is pleasing. I say you threw yourself in my way with the intention of

convincing me that you were a much nicer girl than I supposed you to be. Am I correct?"

"Quite correct," said Miss Noble in a low voice. "It was an innocent plot."

"It is the favourite one—it has been in the English magazines every month since I was a child. Well, I am convinced. Don't misunderstand me. I find you brainier, wittier, and nicer in every respect; in fact, you are even more calculated than I assumed to spoil his life."

"Mr. Pybus!"

"Keep your temper—it's a reflection on him, not on you. I'll explain. Cuthbert is my heir faute de mieux—which may be translated as 'Because I haven't a son, much as I should like one'—and though I've never pretended he was the apple of my eye, I should regret to see him come to grief. If you were the flabby, phonographic sort of young woman that would echo his sentiments and make him happy, I'd say, 'Take him with my sympathy—he's yours!' You're a hundred per cent. too charming for the marriage to be a success. You've come down to his standard very effectually so far, I admit—it must have given you a lot of trouble—but you couldn't hope to impose on him always; before he had discovered half your attractions they'd break his heart."

"I don't know what to say to you. Then—then you refuse?"

"It's a novelty to see you at a loss. Yes, I refuse unhesitatingly. Among the few certainties of life we may count the fact that you'll never marry Cuthbert with any help from me."

"For the reason that you've given me?"

"Among others. If I may say so, for the further reason that I don't wish you to be unhappy either. You find him a pill, naturally; and you'd have been bored to death."

"You are despising me," she exclaimed; "you think I'm a mercenary creature without a heart, who——"

"Don't talk to me as if I were Cuthbert. I don't despise you in the least. You are in a very precarious and overcrowded calling, and you'd have married him for position—as hundreds and thousands of fashionable and wealthy girls would be willing to marry him if I smiled approval—but I know you'd have found him dear at the price. And I have a third reason, though I can assert quite truthfully that the first alone would have prevented my consenting. I'd like to marry you myself."

"You?" she gasped.

"Why not? Of course you're not in love with me; but you like me much better than you like him, you can't dispute it. Professionally you are nineteen, I suppose; that's to say you are in reality about twenty-eight; so I'm two-and-twenty years older than you are. It's a lump, but I'm lively for my age, and if you go on flirting with me you'll make me feel considerably younger. It'll be rough on Cuthbert, I own—my marrying you will cost him about a million. Still, he won't have you in any case; and a hundred and fifty a year would be a great deal more appropriate. Besides, it's entirely his own fault; he should have taken 'no' for an answer when he came to see me, and then I should never have met you. Think it over. If you regard me as a fairly

young man, you needn't hesitate; and if you don't, remember that there's no fool like an old one—that you'll have a very good time."

"You couldn't respect me?" murmured Miss Noble. "You'd feel that I was only marrying the money—that the man didn't matter?"

"I am not without some natural vanity, I assure you. Come, which do you feel more at home with, him or me?"

"You," admitted Miss Noble softly.

"That settles it!" said Pybus. "We'll get Tiffany's to send round some engagement rings in the morning."

X

THE DRESS CLOTHES OF MONSIEUR POMPONNET

It was thanks to Touquet that she was able to look so chic—the little baggage!—yet of all her suitors Touquet was the one she favoured least. He was the costumier at the corner of the Rue des Martyrs, and made a very fair thing of the second-hand clothes. It was to Touquet's that the tradesmen of the Quarter turned as a matter of course to hire dress-suits for their nuptials; it was in the well-cleaned satins of Touquet's that the brides' mothers and the lady guests cut such imposing figures when they were photographed after the wedding breakfasts; it was even Touquet who sometimes supplied a gown to one or another of the humble actresses at the Théâtre Montmartre, and received a couple of free tickets in addition to his fee. I tell you that Touquet was not a person to be sneezed at, though he had passed the first flush of youth, and was never an Adonis.

Besides, who was she, this little Lisette, who had the impudence to flout him? A girl in a florist's, if you can believe me, with no particular beauty herself, and not a

sou by way of dot! And yet—one must confess it—she turned a head as swiftly as she made a "button-hole;" and Pomponnet, the pastrycook, was paying court to her, too—to say nothing of the homage of Messieurs Tricotrin, the poet, and Goujaud, the painter, and Lajeunie, the novelist. You would never have guessed that her wages were only twenty francs a week, as you watched her valse with Tricotrin at the ball on Saturday evening, or as you saw her enter Pomponnet's shop, when the shutters were up on Sunday afternoon, to feast on his strawberry tarts. Her costumes were the cynosure of the Boulevard Rochechouart!

And they were all due to Touquet, Touquet the infatuated, who lent the fine feathers to her for the sake of a glance, or a pressure of the hand—and wept on his counter afterwards while he wondered whose arms might be embracing her in the costumes that he had cleaned and pressed with so much care. Often he swore that his folly should end—that she should be affianced to him, or go shabby; but, lo! in a day or two she would make her appearance again, to coax for the loan of a smart blouse, or "that hat with the mass of geraniums and the brilliant buckle"—and Touquet would be as weak as ever.

Judge, then, of his despair when he heard that she had agreed to marry Pomponnet! She told him the news with the air of an amiable gossip when she came to return a ball-dress that she had borrowed.

"Enfin," she said—perched on the counter, and swinging her remorseless feet—"it is arranged; I desert the flowers for the pastry, and become the mistress of a shop. I shall have to beg from my good friend

Monsieur Touquet no more — not at all! I shall be his client, like the rest. It will be better, hein?"

Touquet groaned. "You know well, Lisette," he answered, "that it has been a joy to me to place the stock at your disposal, even though it was to make you more attractive in the eyes of other men. Everything here that you have worn possesses a charm to me. I fondle the garments when you bring them back; I take them down from the pegs and dream over them. Truly! There is no limit to my weakness, for often when a customer proposes to hire a frock that you have had, I cannot bear that she should profane it, and I say that it is engaged."

"You dear, kind Monsieur Touquet," murmured the coquette; "how agreeable you are!"

"I have always hoped for the day when the stock would be all your own, Lisette! And by and by we might have removed to a better position—even down the hill. Who knows? We might have opened a business in the Madeleine Quarter! That would suit you better than a little cake shop up a side street? And I would have risked it for you—I know how you incline to fashion. When I have taken you to a theatre, did you choose the Montmartre — where we might have gone for nothing—or the Belleville? Not you—that might do for other girls! *You* have always demanded the theatres of the Grands Boulevards; a cup of coffee at the Café de la Paix is more to your taste than a bock and three hard-boiled eggs at 'The Purple Monkey.' Heaven knows I trust you will be happy, but I cannot persuade myself that this

Pomponnet shares your ambitions; with his slum and his stale pastry he is quite content."

"It is not stale," she said.

"Well, we will pass his pastry—though, word of honour, I bought some there last week that might have been baked before the Commune; but to recur to his soul, is it an affinity?"

"Affinities are always hard up," she pouted.

"Bah!" exclaimed Touquet, "now your mind is running on that Gustave Tricotrin—by 'affinities' I do not mean hungry poets! Why not have intrusted your happiness to *me?* I adore you; I have told you a thousand times that I adore you. Lisette, consider before it is too late! You cannot love this — this obscure baker?"

She gave a shrug. "It is a fact that devotion has not robbed me of my appetite," she confessed. "But what would you have? His business goes far better than you imagine—I have seen his books; and, anyhow, my sentiment for you is friendship, and no more."

"To the devil with friendship!" cried the unhappy wardrobe-dealer; "did I dress you like the Empress Josephine for friendship?"

"Do not mock yourself of it," she said reprovingly; "remember that 'Friendship is a beautiful flower, of which esteem is the root.'" And, having thrown the adage to him, coupled with a glance that drove him to distraction, the little flirt jumped off the counter and was gone.

Much more reluctantly she contemplated parting with him whom the costumier had described as a "hungry poet;" but matrimony did not enter into the poet's

scheme of things, nor for that matter had she ever regarded him as a possible parti. Yet a woman may give her fancy where her reason refuses to follow, and when she imparted her news to Tricotrin there was no smile on her lips.

"We shall not go to balls any more, old dear," she said. "Monsieur Pomponnet has proposed marriage to me—and I range myself."

"Heartless girl," exclaimed the young man, with tears in his eyes. "So much for woman's constancy!"

"Mon Dieu," she faltered, "did you then love me, Gustave—really?"

"I do not know," said Tricotrin, "but since I am to lose you, I prefer to think so. Oh, do not grieve for me—fortunately, there is always the Seine! And first I shall pour my misery into song; and in years to come, fair daughters at your side will read the deathless poem, little dreaming that the Lisette I sang to is their mother. Some time—long after I am in my grave, when France has honoured me at last—you may stand before a statue that bears my name, and think, 'He loved me, and I broke his heart!'"

"Oh," she whimpered, "rather than break your heart I—I might break the engagement. I might consider again, Gustave."

"No, no," returned Tricotrin, "I will not reproach myself with the thought that I have marred your life; I will leave you free! Besides, as I say, I am not certain that I should want you so much but for the fact that I have lost you. After all, you will not appreciate the poem that immortalises you, and if I lived, many of your remarks about it would doubtless infuriate me."

"Why shall I not appreciate it? Am I so stupid?"

"It is not that you are stupid, my Soul," he explained; "it is that I am transcendentally clever. To understand the virtues of my work one must have sipped from all the flowers of Literature; 'There is to be found in it Racine, Voltaire, Flaubert, Renan—and always Gustave Tricotrin,' as Lemaître has written. He wrote, '—and always Anatole France,' but I paraphrase him slightly. So you are to marry Pomponnet? Mon Dieu, when I have any sous in my pocket, I will ruin myself for the rapture of regretting you among the pastry!"

"I thought," she said, a little mortified, "that you were going to drown yourself?"

"Am I not to write my Lament to you? I must eat while I write it—why not pastry? Also, when I am penniless and starving, you may sometimes, in your prosperity—— And yet, perhaps, it is too much to ask!"

"Grant you credit, do you mean? Oh yes, Gustave, how can you doubt that I will do that? In memory of——"

"In memory of the love that has been, you will allow me to run up a small score for cakes, will you not, Lisette?"

"I will, indeed!" she promised. "But, but—— Oh, it's quite true, I should never understand you! A minute ago you made me think of you in the Morgue, and now you make me think of you in the cake shop. What are you laughing at?"

"I laugh, like Figaro," said Tricotrin, "that I may not be obliged to weep. When are you going to throw yourself away, my little Lisette? Has my accursed rival induced you to fix a date?"

"We are to be married in a fortnight's time," she said. "And if you could undertake to be sensible, I would ask Alphonse to invite you to the breakfast."

"In a fortnight's time hunger and a hopeless passion will probably have made an end of me," replied the poet; "however, if I survive, the breakfast would certainly be welcome. Where is it to be held? I can recommend a restaurant that is especially fine at such affairs, and most moderate. 'Photographs of the party are taken gratuitously in the Jardin d'Acclimatation, and pianos are at the disposal of the ladies;' I quote from the menu—I study it in the window every time I pass. There are wedding breakfasts from six to twelve francs per head. At six francs, the party have their choice of two soups and three hors d'œuvres. Then comes 'poisson'—I fear it may be whiting—with a green sauce, filet de bœuf with tomates farcies, bouchées à la Reine, chicken, pigeons, salad, two vegetables, an ice, assorted fruits, and biscuits. The wines are madeira, a bottle of mâcon to each person, a bottle of bordeaux among four persons, and a bottle of champagne among ten persons. Also coffee and liqueurs. At six francs a head! It is good, hein? At seven francs there is a bottle of champagne among every eight persons—Pomponnet will, of course, do as he thinks best. At eight francs, a bottle is provided for every six persons. I have too much delicacy to make suggestions, but should he be willing to soar to twelve francs a head, I might eat enough to last a week—and of such quality! The soups would then be bisque d'écrevisse and consommé Rachel. Rissoles de foie gras would appear! Asparagus 'in branches,' and com-

pote pêches marasquin would be included. Also, in the twelve-franc breakfast, the champagne begins to have a human name on the label!"

Now, it is not certain how much of this information Lisette repeated to Pomponnet, but Pomponnet, having a will of his own, refused to entertain M. Tricotrin at any price at all. Moreover, he found it unconventional that she should desire the poet's company, considering the attentions that he had paid her; and she was forced to listen, with an air of humility which she was far from feeling, to a lecture on the responsibilities of her new position.

"I am not a jealous man," said the pastrycook, who was as jealous a man as ever baked a pie, "but it would be discreet that you dropped this acquaintance now that we are engaged. I know well that you have never taken the addresses of such a fellow seriously, and that it is only in the goodness of your heart you wish to present him with a blow-out. Nevertheless, the betrothal of a man in my circumstances is much remarked; all the daughters of the hairdresser next door have had their hopes of me—indeed, there is scarcely a neighbour who is not chagrined at the turn events have taken—and the world would be only too glad of an excuse to call me 'fool.' Pomponnet's wife must be above suspicion. You will remember that a little lightness of conduct which might be forgiven in the employée of the florist would be unseemly in my fiancée. No more conversation with Monsieur Tricotrin, Lisette! Some dignity—some coldness in the bow when you pass him! The Boulevard will observe it, it will be approved."

"You, of course, know best, my dear Alphonse," she

returned meekly; "I am only an inexperienced girl, and I am thankful to have your advice to guide me. But let me say that never, never has there been any 'lightness of conduct' to distress you. Monsieur Tricotrin and I have been merely friends! If I have gone to a ball with him sometimes—and I acknowledge that has happened—it has been because nobody more to my taste has offered to take me." She had ground her little teeth under the infliction of his homily, and it was only by dint of thinking hard of his profits that she abstained from retorting that he might marry all the daughters of the hairdresser and go to Uganda.

However, during the next week or so, she did not chance to meet the poet on the Boulevard, and since she wished to conquer her tenderness for him, one cannot doubt that all would have been well but for the editor of *Le Demi-Mot.* By a freak of fate, the editor of *Le Demi-Mot* was moved to invite M. Tricotrin to dine at his house two days previous to the wedding. What followed? Naturally Tricotrin must present himself in evening dress. Naturally, also, he must go to Touquet's to hire the suit.

"Regard," said the costumier, "here is a suit that I have just acquired. Monsieur will observe that it is of the most distinguished cut—quite in the latest fashion. I will whisper to Monsieur that it comes to me through the valet of the Comte de Château-Leroy!"

"Mon Dieu," said Tricotrin, "let me try it on!" And he was so gratified by his appearance in it that he barely winced at the thought of the expense. "I am improving my position," he soliloquised; "if I have not precisely inherited the mantle of Victor Hugo, I have,

at any rate, hired the dress-suit of the Comte de Château-Leroy!"

Never had a more impressive spectacle been witnessed in Montmartre than Tricotrin's departure from his lodging in the Rue des Trois Frères shortly after six o'clock. Wearing a shirt of Pitou's, Flamant's patent-leather boots, and a white tie contributed by Goujaud, the young man sallied forth with the deportment of the Count himself. Only one thing more did he desire—a flower for his buttonhole; and Lisette remained in her situation until the morrow! What more natural, finally, than that he should hie to the florist's?

It was the first time that she had seen her lover in evening dress, and sentiment overpowered her as he entered.

"Thou!" she murmured, paling.

On the poet, too, the influence of the clothes was very strong; attired like a jeune premier, he craved with all the dramatic instinct of his nature for a love scene; and, instead of fulfilling his intention to beg for a rosebud at cost price, he gazed at her soulfully, and breathed "Lisette!"

"So we have met again!" she said.

"The world is small," returned the poet, ignoring the fact that he had come to the shop. "And am I yet remembered?"

"It is not likely I should forget you in a few days," she said, more practically; "I didn't forget about the breakfast, either, but Alphonse put his foot down."

"Pig!" said the poet. "And yet it may be better so! How could I eat in such an hour?"

"However, you are not disconsolate this evening?" she suggested. "Mon Dieu, what a swell you are!"

"Bah! some fashionable assembly that will bore me beyond endurance!" he sighed. "With you alone, Lisette, have I known true happiness—the tram rides on summer nights that were joyous because we loved, the simple meals that were sweetened by your smiles!"

"O Gustave!" she said. "Wait, I must give you a flower for your coat!"

"I shall keep it all my life!" vowed Tricotrin. "Tell me, little one—I dare not stay now, because my host lives a long way off—but this evening, could you not meet me once again? For the last time, to say farewell? I have nearly two francs fifty, and we might go to supper, if you agree."

It was arranged before he took leave of her that she should meet him outside the débit at the corner of the Rue de Sontay at eleven o'clock, and sup with him there, in a locality where she was unlikely to be recognised. Rash enough, this conduct, for a young woman who was to be married to another man on the next day but one! But a greater imprudence was to follow. They supped, they sentimentalised, and when they parted in the Champs Elyées and the moonshine, she gave him from her bosom a little rose-coloured envelope that contained nothing less than a lock of her hair.

The poet placed it tenderly in his waistcoat pocket; and, after he had wept, and quoted poetry to the stars, forgot it. He began to wish that he had not mixed his liquors quite so impartially and, on the morrow, when he woke, he was mindful of nothing more grievous than a splitting headache.

Now Touquet, who could not sleep of nights because the pastrycook was going to marry Lisette, made a practice of examining the pockets of all garments returned to him, with an eye to stray sous; and when he proceeded to examine the pockets of the dress-suit returned by M. Tricotrin, what befell but that he drew forth a rose-tinted envelope containing a tress of hair, and inscribed, "To Gustave, from Lisette. Adieu."

And the editor who invited M. Tricotrin had never heard of Lisette; never heard of Pomponnet; did not know that such a person as Touquet existed; yet the editorial caprice had manipulated destinies. How powerful are editors! How complicated is life!

But a truce to philosophy—let us deal with the emotions of the soul! The shop reeled before Touquet. All the good and the bad in his character battled tumultuously. In one moment he aspired to be generous and restore to Lisette the evidence of her guilt; in the next he sunk to the base thought of displaying it to Pomponnet and breaking off the match. The discovery fired his brain. No longer was he a nonentity, the "odd man out"—chance had transformed him to the master of the situation. Full well he knew that there would be no nuptials next day were Pomponnet aware of his fiancée's perfidy; it needed but to go to him, to say, "Monsieur, my sense of duty compels me to inform you——" How easy it would be! He laughed hysterically.

But Lisette would never pardon such a meanness—she would always despise and hate him! He would have torn her from his rival's arms, it was true, yet his own would still be empty. "Ah, Lisette, Lisette!"

groaned the wretched man; and, swept to evil by the force of passion, he cudgelled his mind to devise some piece of trickery, some diabolical artifice, by which the incriminating token might be placed in the pastrycook's hands as if by accident.

And while he pondered—his "whole soul a chaos" —in that hour Pomponnet entered to hire a dress-suit for his wedding!

Touquet raised his head, blanched to the lips.

"Regard," he said, with a forced calm terrible to behold; "here is a suit that I have just acquired. Monsieur will observe that it is of the most distinguished cut—quite in the latest fashion. I will whisper to Monsieur that it comes to me through the valet of the Comte de Château-Leroy." And, unseen by the guileless bridegroom, he slipped the damning proof into a pocket of the trousers, where his knowledge of the pastrycook's attitudes assured him that it was even more certain to be found than in the waistcoat.

"Mon Dieu!" said the other, duly impressed by the suit's pedigree; "let me try it on. . . . The coat is rather tight," he complained, "but it has undeniably an air!"

"No more than one customer has worn it," gasped the wardrobe dealer haggardly: "*Monsieur Gustave Tricotrin, the poet, who hired it last night!* The suit is practically new; I have no other in the establishment to compare with it. Listen, Monsieur Pomponnet! To an old patron like yourself, I will be liberal; wear it this evening for an hour in your home—if you find it not to your figure, there will be time to make another selection before the ceremony to-morrow. You shall have this on trial, I will make no extra charge."

Such magnanimity was bound to have its effect, and five minutes later Touquet's plot had progressed. But the tension had been frightful; the door had scarcely closed when he sank into a chair, trembling in every limb, and for the rest of the day he attended to his business like one moving in a trance.

Meanwhile, the unsuspecting Pomponnet reviewed the arrangement with considerable satisfaction; and when he came to attire himself, after the cake shop was shut, his reflected image pleased him so well that he was tempted to stroll abroad. He decided to call on his bethrothed, and to exhibit himself a little on the Boulevard. Accordingly, he put some money in the pocket of the waistcoat, oiled his silk hat, to give it an additional lustre, and sallied forth in high good-humour.

"How splendid you look, my dear Alphonse!" exclaimed Lisette, little dreaming it was the same suit that she had approved on Tricotrin the previous evening.

Her innocent admiration was agreeable to Pomponnet; he patted her on the cheek.

"In truth," he said carelessly, "I had forgotten that I had it on! But I was so impatient for to-morrow, my pet angel, that I could not remain alone, and I had to come to see you."

They were talking on her doorstep, for she had no apartment in which it would have been convenable to entertain him, and it appeared to him that the terrace of a café would be more congenial.

"Run upstairs and make your toilette, my loving duck," he suggested, "and I shall take you out for a tasse. While you are getting ready, I will smoke a cigar." And he drew his cigar-case from the breast-

pocket of the coat, and took a match-box from the pocket where he had put his cash.

It was a balmy evening, sweet with the odour of spring, and the streets were full of life. As he promenaded with her on the Boulevard, Pomponnet did not fail to remark the attention commanded by his costume. He strutted proudly, and when they reached the café and took their seats, he gave his order with the authority of the President.

"Mon Dieu!" he remarked, "it is pleasant here, hein?" And then, stretching his legs, he thrust both his hands into the pockets of his trousers. "Comment?" he murmured. "What have I found? . . . . Now is not this amusing—I swear it is a billet-doux!" He bent, chuckling, to the light—and bounded in his chair with an oath that turned a dozen heads towards them. "Traitress," roared Pomponnet, "miserable traitress! It is *your* name! It is your *writing!* It is your *hair!* Do not deny it; give me your head—it matches to a shade! Jezebel, last night you have met Monsieur Tricotrin—you have deceived me!"

Lisette, who had jumped as high as he in recognising the envelope, sat like one paralysed now. Her tongue refused to move. For an instant, the catastrophe seemed to her of supernatural agency—it was as if a miracle had happened, as she saw her fiancé produce her lover's keepsake. All she could stammer at last was:

"Let us go away—pay for the coffee!"

"I will not pay," shouted M. Pomponnet. "Pay for it yourself, jade—I have done with you!" And, leaving her spellbound at the table, he strode from the terrace like a madman before the waiters could stop him.

Oh, of course, he was well known in the café, and they did not detain Lisette, but it was a most ignominious position for a young woman. And there was no wedding next day, and everybody knew why. The little coquette, who had mocked suitors by the dozen, was jilted almost on the threshold of the Mairie. She smacked Tricotrin's face in the morning, but her humiliation was so acute that it demanded the salve of immediate marriage; and at the moment she could think of no one better than Touquet.

So Touquet won her after all; and though by this time she may guess how he accomplished it, he will tell you—word of honour!—that never, never has he had occasion for regret.

XI

THE SUICIDES IN THE RUE SOMBRE

HAVING bought the rope, Tournicquot wondered where he should hang himself. The lath-and-plaster ceiling of his room might decline to support him, and while the streets were populous a lamp-post was out of the question. As he roamed on, he reflected that a pan of charcoal would have been more convenient after all; but the coil of rope in the doorway of a shop had lured his fancy, and now it would be laughable to throw it away.

Tournicquot was much averse from being laughed at in private life—perhaps because Fate had willed that he should be laughed at so much in his public capacity at Le Jardin Extérieur. Could he have had his way, indeed, Tournicquot would have been a great tragedian, instead of a little droll, whose portraits, with a bright red nose and a scarlet wig, grimaced on the kiosks; and he resolved that, at any rate, the element of humour should not mar his suicide.

As to the motive for his death, it was as romantic as his heart desired. He adored "La Belle Lucrèce,"

the fascinating Snake Charmer, and somewhere in the background the artiste had a husband. Little the audience at Le Jardin Extérieur suspected the passion that devoured their grotesque comedian while he cut his capers, and turned love to ridicule; little they divined the pathos of a situation which condemned him behind the scenes to whisper the most sentimental assurances of devotion when disfigured by a flaming wig and a nose that was daubed vermilion! How nearly it has been said, One half of the world does not know how the other half loves!

But such incongruities would distress Tournicquot no more—to-day he was to die; he had worn his chess-board trousers and his little green coat for the last time; for the last time had the relentless virtue of Lucrèce driven him to despair. When he was discovered inanimate, hanging to a beam, nothing comic about him, perhaps the world would admit that his soul had been solemn, though his "line of business" had been funny; perhaps Lucrèce would even drop warm tears upon his tomb!

It was early in the evening. Dusk was gathering over Paris; the promise of dinner was in the breeze. The white glare of electric globes began to flood the boulevards, and before the cafés, waiters bustled among the tables, bearing the vermouth and absinthe of the hour. Instinctively shunning the more frequented thoroughfares, Tournicquot wandered, plunged in reverie, until he perceived that he had reached a neighbourhood which was unknown to him—that he stood at the corner of a street which bore the name "Rue Sombre." Opposite, one of the houses was

being rebuilt, and as he gazed at it—this skeleton of a home in which the workmen's hammers were silenced for the night—Tournicquot recognised that his journey was at an end. Here, he could not doubt that he would find the last, grim hospitality that he sought. The house had no door to bar his entrance, but—as if in omen—above the gap where a door had been, the sinister number "13" was still to be discerned. He cast a glance over his shoulder, and, grasping the rope with a firm hand, crept inside.

It was dark within, so dark that at first he could discern nothing but the gleam of bare walls. He stole along the passage, and, mounting a flight of steps on which his feet sprung mournful echoes, proceeded stealthily towards an apartment on the first floor. At this point the darkness became impenetrable, for the persiennes had been closed, and in order to make his arrangements, it was necessary that he should have a light. He paused, fumbling in his pocket; and then, with his next step, blundered against a body, which swung from the contact, like a human being suspended in mid-air.

Tournicquot leapt backwards in terror. A cold sweat bespangled him, and for some seconds he shook so violently that he was unable to strike a match. At last, when he accomplished it, he beheld an apparently dead man hanging by a rope in the doorway.

"Oh, mon Dieu!" gasped Tournicquot. And the thudding of his heart seemed to resound through the deserted house.

Humanity impelled him to rescue the poor wretch,

if it was still to be done. Shuddering, he whipped out his knife, and sawed at the cord desperately. The cord was stout, and the blade of the knife but small; an eternity seemed to pass while he sawed in the darkness. Presently one of the strands gave way. He set his teeth and pressed harder, and harder yet. Suddenly the rope yielded and the body fell to the ground. Tournicquot threw himself beside it, tearing open the collar, and using frantic efforts to restore animation. There was no result. He persevered, but the body lay perfectly inert. He began to reflect that it was his duty to inform the police of the discovery, and he asked himself how he should account for his presence on the scene. Just as he was considering this, he felt the stir of life. As if by a miracle the man groaned.

"Courage, my poor fellow!" panted Tournicquot. "Courage—all is well!"

The man groaned again; and after an appalling silence, during which Tournicquot began to tremble for his fate anew, asked feebly, "Where am I?"

"You would have hanged yourself," explained Tournicquot. "Thanks to Heaven, I arrived in time to save your life!"

In the darkness they could not see each other, but he felt for the man's hand and pressed it warmly. To his consternation, he received, for response, a thump in the chest.

"Mon Dieu, what an infernal cheek!" croaked the man. "So you have cut me down? You meddlesome idiot, by what right did you poke your nose into my affairs, hein?"

Dismay held Tournicquot dumb.

"Hein?" wheezed the man; "what concern was it of yours, if you please? Never in my life before have I met with such a piece of presumption!"

"My poor friend," stammered Tournicquot, "you do not know what you say—you are not yourself! By and by, you will be grateful, you will fall on your knees and bless me."

"By and by I shall punch you in the eye," returned the man, "just as soon as I am feeling better! What have you done to my collar, too? I declare you have played the devil with me!" His annoyance rose. "Who are you, and what were you doing here, anyhow? You are a trespasser—I shall give you in charge."

"Come, come," said Tournicquot, conciliatingly, "if your misfortunes are more than you can bear, I regret that I was obliged to save you; but, after all, there is no need to make such a grievance of it; you can hang yourself another day."

"And why should I be put to the trouble twice?" grumbled the other. "Do you figure yourself that it is agreeable to hang? I passed a very bad time, I can assure you! If you had experienced it, you would not talk so lightly about 'another day.' The more I think of your impudent interference, the more it vexes me. And how dark it is! Get up and light the candle—it gives me the hump here."

"I have no candle, I have no candle," babbled Tournicquot. "I do not carry candles in my pocket."

"There is a bit on the mantelpiece," replied the man, angrily; "I saw it when I came in. Go and

feel for it—hunt about! Do not keep me lying here in the dark—the least you can do is to make me as comfortable as you can!"

Tournicquot, not a little perturbed by the threat of assault, groped obediently; but the room appeared to be of the dimensions of a park, and he arrived at the candle stump only after a prolonged excursion. The flame revealed to him a man of about his own age, who leant against the wall regarding him with indignant eyes. Revealed, also, was the coil of rope that the comedian had brought for his own use; and the man pointed to it.

"What is that? It was not here just now."

"It belongs to me," admitted Tournicquot, nervously.

"I see that it belongs to you. Why do you visit an empty house with a coil of rope, hein? I should like to understand that! . . . Upon my life, you were here on the same business as myself! Now if this does not pass all forbearance! You come to commit suicide, and yet you have the effrontery to put a stop to mine!"

"Well," exclaimed Tournicquot, "I obeyed an impulse of pity! It is true that I came to destroy myself, for I am the most miserable of men; but I was so much affected by the sight of your sufferings that temporarily I forgot my own."

"That is a lie, for I was not suffering—I was not conscious when you came in. However, you have some pretty moments in front of you, so we will say no more! When you feel yourself drop, it will be diabolical, I promise you; the hair stands erect on the head, and each spot of blood in the veins congeals

to a separate icicle! It is true that the drop itself is swift, but the clutch of the rope, as you kick in the air, is hardly less atrocious. Do not be encouraged by the delusion that the matter is instantaneous. Time mocks you, and a second holds the sensations of a quarter of an hour. What has forced you to it? We need not stand on ceremony with each other, hein?"

"I have resolved to die because life is torture," said Tournicquot, on whom these details had made an unfavourable impression.

"The same with me! A woman, of course?"

"Yes," sighed Tournicquot, "a woman!"

"Is there no other remedy? Cannot you desert her?"

"Desert her? I pine for her embrace!"

"Hein?"

"She will not have anything to do with me!"

"Comment? Then it is love with you?"

"What else? An eternal passion!"

"Oh, mon Dieu, I took it for granted that you were married! But this is droll. *You* would die because you cannot get hold of a woman, and *I* because I cannot get rid of one. We should talk, we two. Can you give me a cigarette?"

"With pleasure, monsieur," responded Tournicquot, producing a packet. "I, also, will take one—my last!"

"If I expressed myself hastily just now," said his companion, refastening his collar, "I shall apologise—no doubt your interference was well meant, though I do not pretend to approve it. Let us dismiss the

incident; you have behaved tactlessly, and I, on my side, have perhaps resented your error with too much warmth. Well, it is finished! While the candle burns, let us exchange more amicable views. Is my cravat straight? It astonishes me to hear that love can drive a man to such despair. I, too, have loved, but never to the length of the rope. There are plenty of women in Paris—if one has no heart, there is always another. I am far from proposing to frustrate your project, holding as I do that a man's suicide is an intimate matter in which 'rescue' is a name given by busybodies to a gross impertinence; but as you have not begun the job, I will confess that I think you are being rash."

"I have considered," replied Tournicquot, "I have considered attentively. There is no alternative, I assure you."

"I would make another attempt to persuade the lady—I swear I would make another attempt! You are not a bad-looking fellow. What is her objection to you?"

"It is not that she objects to me—on the contrary. But she is a woman of high principle, and she has a husband who is devoted to her—she will not break his heart. It is like that."

"Young?"

"No more than thirty."

"And beautiful?"

"With a beauty like an angel's! She has a dimple in her right cheek when she smiles that drives one to distraction."

"Myself, I have no weakness for dimples; but

every man to his taste—there is no arguing about these things. What a combination—young, lovely, virtuous! And I make you a bet the oaf of a husband does not appreciate her! Is it not always so? Now *I*—but of course I married foolishly, I married an artiste. If I had my time again I would choose in preference any sempstress. The artistes are for applause, for bouquets, for little dinners, but not for marriage."

"I cannot agree with you," said Tournicquot, with some hauteur. "Your experience may have been unfortunate, but the theatre contains women quite as noble as any other sphere. In proof of it, the lady I adore is an artiste herself!"

"Really—is it so? Would it be indiscreet to ask her name?"

"There are things that one does not tell."

"Perfectly! But as a matter of interest? There is nothing derogatory to her in what you say—quite the reverse."

"True! Well, the reason for reticence is removed! She is known as 'La Belle Lucrèce.'"

"*Hein?*" ejaculated the other, jumping.

"What ails you?"

"She is my wife!"

"Your wife? Impossible!"

"I tell you I am married to her—she is 'Madame Béguinet.'"

"Mon Dieu!" faltered Tournicquot, aghast; "what have I done!"

"So? . . . You are her lover?"

"Never has she encouraged me—recall what I

said! There are no grounds for jealousy—am I not about to die because she spurns me? I swear to you——"

"You mistake my emotion—why should I be jealous? Not at all—I am only amazed. She thinks I am devoted to her? Ho, ho! Not at all! You see my 'devotion' by the fact that I am about to hang myself rather than live with her. And *you*, you cannot bear to live because you adore her! Actually, you 'adore' her! Is it not inexplicable? Oh, there is certainly the finger of Providence in this meeting! . . . Wait, we must discuss — we should come to each other's aid! . . . Give me another cigarette."

Some seconds passed while they smoked in silent meditation.

"Listen," resumed M. Béguinet; "in order to clear up this complication, a perfect candour is required on both sides. Alors, as to your views, is it that you aspire to marry Madame? I do not wish to appear exigent, but in the position that I occupy you will realise that it is my duty to make the most favourable arrangements that I can for her. Now open your heart to me; speak frankly!"

"It is difficult for me to express myself without restraint to you, monsieur," said Tournicquot, "because circumstances cause me to regard you as a grievance. To answer you with all the delicacy possible, I will say that if I had cut you down five minutes later, life would be a fairer thing to me."

"Good," said M. Béguinet, "we make progress! Your income? Does it suffice to support her in the

style to which she is accustomed? What may your occupation be?"

"I am in Madame's own profession—I, too, am an artiste."

"So much the more congenial! I foresee a joyous union. Come, we go famously! Your line of business — snakes, ventriloquism, performing-rabbits, what is it?"

"My name is 'Tournicquot,'" responded the comedian, with dignity. "All is said!"

"A-ah! Is it so? Now I understand why your voice has been puzzling me! Monsieur Tournicquot, I am enchanted to make your acquaintance. I declare the matter arranges itself! I shall tell you what we will do. Hitherto I have had no choice between residing with Madame and committing suicide, because my affairs have not prospered, and—though my pride has revolted—her salary has been essential for my maintenance. Now the happy medium jumps to the eyes; for you, for me, for her the bright sunshine streams! I shall efface myself; I shall go to a distant land—say, Belgium—and you shall make me a snug allowance. Have no misgiving; crown her with blossoms, lead her to the altar, and rest tranquil—I shall never reappear. Do not figure yourself that I shall enter like the villain at the Ambigu and menace the blissful home. Not at all! I myself may even re-marry, who knows? Indeed, should you offer me an allowance adequate for a family man, I will undertake to re-marry—I have always inclined towards speculation. That will shut my mouth, hein? I could threaten nothing, even if I had a base nature, for I,

also, shall have committed bigamy. Suicide, bigamy, I would commit anything rather than live with Lucrèce!"

"But Madame's consent must be gained," demurred Tournicquot; "you overlook the fact that Madame must consent. It is a fact that I do not understand why she should have any consideration for you, but if she continues to harp upon her 'duty,' what then?"

"Do you not tell me that her only objection to your suit has been her fear that she would break my heart? What an hallucination! I shall approach the subject with tact, with the utmost delicacy. I shall intimate to her that to ensure her happiness I am willing to sacrifice myself. Should she hesitate, I shall demand to sacrifice myself! Rest assured that if she regards you with the favour that you believe, your troubles are at an end—the barrier removes itself, and you join hands. . . . The candle is going out! Shall we depart?"

"I perceive no reason why we should remain; in truth, we might have got out of it sooner."

"You are right! a café will be more cheerful. Suppose we take a bottle of wine together; how does it strike you? If you insist, I will be your guest; if not——"

"Ah, monsieur, you will allow me the pleasure," murmured Tournicquot.

"Well, well," said Béguinet, "you must have your way! . . . Your rope you have no use for, hein—we shall leave it?"

"But certainly! Why should I burden myself?"

"The occasion has passed, true. Good! Come, my comrade, let us descend."

Who shall read the future? Awhile ago they had been strangers, neither intending to quit the house alive; now the pair issued from it jauntily, arm in arm! Both were in high spirits, and by the time the lamps of a café gave them welcome, and the wine gurgled gaily into the glasses, they pledged each other with a sentiment no less than fraternal.

"How I rejoice that I have met you!" exclaimed Béguinet. "To your marriage, mon vieux; to your joy! Fill up, again a glass!—there are plenty of bottles in the cellar. Mon Dieu, you are my preserver—I must embrace you! Never till now have I felt such affection for a man! This evening all was black to me, I despaired, my heart was as heavy as a cannon-ball—and suddenly the world is bright! Roses bloom before my feet, and the little larks are singing in the sky. I dance, I skip! How beautiful, how sublime is friendship!—better than riches, than youth, than the love of woman; riches melt, youth flies, woman snores. But friendship is—— Again a glass! It goes well, this wine. Let us have a lobster! I swear I have an appetite; they make one peckish, these suicides, n'est-ce-pas? I shall not be formal—if you consider it your treat, you shall pay. A lobster and another bottle? At your expense or mine?"

"Ah, the bill all in one!" declared Tournicquot.

"Well, well," said Béguinet, "you must have your way! What a happy man I am! Already I feel twenty years younger. You would not believe what I have suffered! My agonies would fill a book. Really! By nature I am domesticated; but my home is impossible—I shudder when I enter it. It is only in a restaurant

that I see a clean tablecloth. Absolutely! I pig! All Lucrèce thinks about is frivolity."

"No, no," demurred Tournicquot; "to that I cannot agree."

"What do you know? You 'cannot agree'! You have seen her when she is laced in her stage costume, when she prinks and prattles, with the paint, and the powder, and her best corset on. It is I who am 'behind the scenes,' mon ami, not you! I see her dirty peignoir and her curl rags. At four o'clock in the afternoon! Every day! You 'cannot agree'!"

"Curl rags?" faltered Tournicquot.

"But certainly! I tell you I am of a gentle disposition; I am most tolerant of women's failings; it says much that I would have hanged myself rather than remain with a woman. Her untidiness is not all; her toilet at home revolts my sensibilities, but—well, one cannot have everything, and her salary is substantial; I have closed my eyes to the curl rags. However, snakes are more serious."

"Snakes!" ejaculated Tournicquot.

"Naturally! The beasts must live, do they not support us? But 'everything in its place' is my own motto; the motto of my wife—'All over the place.' Her serpents have shortened my life, word of honour! —they wander where they will. I never lay my head beside those curl rags of hers without anticipating a cobra-de-capello under the bolster. It is not everybody's money! Lucrèce has no objection to them; well, it is very courageous—very fortunate, since snakes are her profession—but *I*, I was not brought up to snakes; I am not at my ease in a Zoological Gardens."

"It is natural."

"Is it not? I desire to explain myself to you, you understand; are we not as brothers? Oh, I realise well that when one loves a woman one always thinks that the faults are with the husband; believe me, I have had much to justify my attitude. Snakes, dirt, furies, what a ménage!"

"Furies?" gasped Tournicquot.

"I am an honest man," affirmed Béguinet, draining another bumper; "I shall not say to you 'I have no blemish, I am perfect.' Not at all! Without doubt, I have occasionally expressed myself to Lucrèce with more candour than courtesy. Such things happen. But——," he refilled his glass, and sighed pathetically, "but to every citizen, whatever his position—whether his affairs may have prospered or not—his wife owes respect. Hein? She should not throw the ragoût at him. She should not menace him with snakes." He wept. "My friend, you will admit that it is not genteel to coerce a husband with deadly reptiles?"

Tournicquot had turned very pale. He signed to the waiter for the bill, and when it was discharged, sat regarding his companion with round eyes. At last, clearing his throat, he said nervously:

"After all, do you know—now one comes to think it over—I am not sure, upon my honour, that our arrangement is feasible?"

"What?" exclaimed Béguinet, with a violent start. "Not feasible? How is that, pray? Because I have opened my heart to you, do you back out? Oh, what treachery! Never will I believe that you could be capable of it!"

"However, it is a fact. On consideration, I shall not rob you of her."

"Base fellow! You take advantage of my confidence. A contract is a contract!"

"No," stammered Tournicquot, "I shall be a man and live my love down. Monsieur, I have the honour to wish you 'Good-night.'"

"Hi, stop!" cried Béguinet, infuriated. "What, then, is to become of *me?* Insolent poltroon—you have even destroyed my rope!"

XII

LITTLE-FLOWER-OF-THE-WOOD

Janiaud used to lie abed all day and drink absinthe all night. When he contrived to write his poetry is a mystery. But he did write it, and he might have written other things, too, if he had had the will. It was once suggested that his paramount duty was to publish a history of modern Paris, for the man was an Encyclopædia of unsuspected facts. Since he can never publish it now, however, I am free to tell the story of the Loup Blanc as he told it to an English editor and me one night on the terrace of the Loup Blanc itself. It befel thus:

When we entered that shabby little Montmartre restaurant, Janiaud chanced to be seated at a table in a corner of the ground-floor room, sipping his favourite stimulant. He was deplorably dirty, and resembled a scarecrow, and the English editor looked nervous when I offered an introduction. Still, Janiaud was Janiaud! The offer was accepted, and Janiaud discoursed in his native tongue.

At midnight the Editor ordered supper. Being unfamiliar with the Loup Blanc in those days, I said that I would drink beer. Janiaud smiled sardonically, and

the waiter surprised us with the information that beer could not be supplied.

"What?"

"After midnight, nothing but champagne," he answered.

"Really? Well, let us go somewhere else," I proposed.

But the Editor would not hear of that. He had a princely soul, and, besides, he was "doing Paris."

"All the same, what does it mean?" he inquired of Janiaud.

Janiaud blew smoke rings. "It is the rule. During the evening the bock drinker is welcomed here as elsewhere; but at midnight—well, you will see what you will see!"

And we saw very soon. The bourgeoisie of Montmartre had straggled out while we talked, and in a little while the restaurant was crowded with a rackety crew who had driven up in cabs. Everybody but ourselves was in evening dress. Where the coppers had been counted carefully, gold was scattered. A space was cleared for dancing, and Mlle. Nan Joliquette, from Olympia, obliged the company with her latest comic song.

The Editor was interested. "It is a queer change, though! Has it always been like this?"

"Ask Janiaud," I said. "*I* don't know."

"Oh, not at all," replied Janiaud; "no, indeed, it was not always like this! The Loup Blanc used to be as quiet at midnight as at any other hour. But it became celebrated as a supper-place; and now it is quite the thing for the ardent spirits, with money, to come here and kick up their heels until five in the morning."

"Curious, how such customs originate!" remarked the Editor. "Here we have a restaurant which is out of the way, which is the reverse of luxurious, and which, for all that, seems to be a gold mine to the proprietor. Look at him! Look at his white waistcoat and his massive watch-chain, his air of prosperity! The man's a millionaire in miniature."

"How did he come to rake it in like this, Janiaud—you know everything?" I said.

The poet stroked his beard, and glanced at his empty glass. The Editor raised the bottle.

"I cannot talk on Clicquot!" demurred Janiaud. "If you insist, I will take another absinthe. Doubtless they will allow it in the circumstances. Sst, Adolphe!" The waiter whisked over to us. "Monsieur pays for champagne, but I prefer absinthe. There is no law against that, hein?"

Adolphe smiled tolerantly.

"Shall we sit outside?" suggested the Editor. "What do you think? It's getting rather riotous in here, isn't it?"

So we moved on to the terrace, and waited while Janiaud prepared his poison.

"It is a coincidence that you have asked me for the history of the Loup Blanc to-night," he began, after a gulp; "if you had asked for it two days earlier, the climax would have been missing. The story completed itself yesterday, and I happened to be here, and saw the end.

"Listen! Dupont—the proprietor whom Monsieur has just admired—used to be chef to a family on the Boulevard Haussmann. He had a very fair salary, and

probably he would have remained in the situation till now but for the fact that he fell in love with the parlour-maid. She was a sprightly little flirt, with ambitions, and she accepted him only on condition that they should withdraw from domestic service and start a business of their own. Dupont was of a cautious temperament; he would have preferred to jog along with some family where a married couple were acceptable in the capacities of chef and housekeeper. Still, he consented; and, with what they had saved between them, they took over this little restaurant—where Monsieur the Editor has treated me with such regal magnificence! It was not they who christened it—it was called 'Le Loup Blanc' already; how it obtained its name is also very interesting, but I have always avoided digressions in my work—that is one of the first principles of the literary art." He swallowed some more absinthe.

"They took the establishment over, and they conducted it on the lines of their predecessor—they provided a table d'hôte déjeûner at one-franc-fifty, and a table d'hôte dinner at two francs. These are side-shows of the Loup Blanc to-day, but, in the period of which I speak, they were all that it had to say for itself—they were its foundation and its cupola! When I had two francs to spare, I used to dine here myself.

"Well, the profits were not dazzling. And after marriage the little parlour-maid developed extravagant tastes. She had a passion for theatres. I, Janiaud, have nothing to say against theatres, excepting that the managers have never put on my dramas, but in the wife of a struggling restaurateur a craze for play-going is not to be encouraged. Monsieur will agree? Also, Madame

had a fondness for dress. She did little behind the counter but display new ribbons and trinkets. She was very stupid at giving change—and always made the mistake on the wrong side for Dupont. At last he had to employ a cousin of his own as dame-de-comptoir. The expenses had increased, and the returns remained the same. In fine, Dupont was in difficulties; the Loup Blanc was on its last legs.

"Listen! There was at that time a dancer called 'Little-Flower-of-the-Wood.' She was very chic, very popular. She had her appartement in the Avenue Wagram, she drove to the stage-doors in her coupé, her photographs were sold like confetti at a carnival. Well, one afternoon, when Dupont's reflections were oscillating between the bankruptcy court and the Morgue, he was stupefied to receive a message from her—she bade him reserve a table for herself and some friends for supper that night!

"Dupont could scarcely credit his ears. He told his wife that a practical joker must be larking with him. He declared that he would take no notice of the message, that he was not such an ass as to be duped by it. Finally, he proposed to telegraph to Little-Flower-of-the-Wood, inquiring if it was genuine.

"Monsieur, as an editor, will have observed that a woman who is incapable in the daily affairs of life, may reveal astounding force in an emergency? It was so in this case. Madame put her foot down. She showed unsuspected commercial aptitude. She firmly forbade Dupont to do anything of the sort!

"'What?' she exclaimed. 'You will telegraph to her, inquiring? Never in this life! You might as well

advise her frankly not to come. What would such a question mean? That you do not think the place is good enough for her! Well, if *you* do not think so, neither will *she*—she will decide that she had a foolish impulse, and stay away!'

"'Mon Dieu! do you dream that a woman accustomed to the Café de Paris, or Maxim's, would choose to sup in an obscure little restaurant like ours?' said Dupont, fuming. 'Do you dream that I am going to buy partridges, and peaches, and wines, and heaven knows what other delicacies, in the dark? Do you dream that I am going to ruin myself while every instinct in me protests? It would be the act of a madman!'

"'My little cabbage,' returned Madame, 'we are so near to ruin as we are, that a step nearer is of small importance. If Little-Flower-of-the-Wood should come, it might be the turning-point in our fortunes—people would hear of it, the Loup Blanc might become renowned. Yes, we shall buy partridges, and peaches—also bonbons, and flowers, and we shall hire a piano! And if the good fairies should indeed send her to us, I swear she shall pass as pleasant an evening as if she had gone to Voisin's, or Paillard's itself!'

"Good! She convinced him. For the rest of the day the Loup Blanc was in a state of frenzy. Never before had such a repast been seen in its kitchen, never before had he cooked with such loving care, even when he had been preparing a dinner of ceremony on the Boulevard Haussmann. Madame herself ran out to arrange for the piano. The floor was swept. The waiter was put into a clean shirt. Dupont shed tears of excitement in his saucepans.

"He served the two-franc dinner that evening with eyes that watched nothing but the clock. All his consciousness now was absorbed by the question whether the dancer would come or not. The dinner passed somehow — it is to be assumed that the customers grumbled, but in his suspense Dupont regarded them with indifference. The hours crept by. It was a quarter to twelve—twelve o'clock. He trembled behind the counter as if with ague. Now it was time that she was here! His face was blanched, his teeth chattered in his head. What if he had been hoaxed after all? Half-past twelve! The sweat ran down him. Terror gripped his heart. A vision of all the partridges wasted convulsed his soul. Hark! a carriage stopped. He tottered forward. The door opened—she had come!

"Women are strange. Little-Flower-of-the-Wood, who yawned her pretty head off at Armenonville, was enraptured with the Loup Blanc. The rest of the party took their tone from her, and everything was pronounced 'fun,' the coarse linen, the dirty ceiling, the admiring stares of the bock drinkers. The lady herself declared that she had 'never enjoyed a supper so much in her life,' and the waiter — it was not Adolphe then—was dumfounded by a louis tip.

"Figure yourself the exultation of Madame! 'Aha,' she chuckled, when they shut up shop at sunrise, 'what did I tell you, my little cabbage?' Monsieur, as an editor, will have observed that a woman who reveals astounding force in an emergency may triumph pettily when the emergency is over?

"'It remains to be seen whether they will come

any more, however,' said Dupont. 'Let us go to bed. Mon Dieu, how sleepy I am!' It was the first occasion that the Loup Blanc had been open till five in the morning.

"It was the first occasion, and for some days they feared it might be the last. But no, the dancer came again! A few eccentrics who came with her flattered themselves on having made a 'discovery.' They boasted of it. Gradually the name of 'Le Loup Blanc' became known. By the time that Little-Flower-of-the-Wood had had enough, there was a supper clientèle without her. Folly is infectious, and in Paris there are always people catching a fresh craze. Dupont began to put up his prices, and levied a charge on the waiter for the privilege of waiting at supper. The rest of the history is more grave! . . . Comment, Monsieur? Eh, bien, if you insist, again an absinthe!'

Janiaud paused, and ran his dirty fingers through his hair.

"This man can talk!" said the Editor, in an undertone.

"Gentlemen," resumed the poet, "two years passed. Little-Flower-of-the-Wood was on the Italian Riviera. The Italian Riviera was awake again after the heat of the summer. The little town that had dozed for many months began to stir. Almost every day now she saw new faces on the promenade. The sky was gentler, the sea was fairer. And she sat loathing it all, craving to escape from it to the bleak streets of Paris.

"Two winters before, she had been told, 'Your

lungs will stand no more of the pranks you have been playing. You must go South, and keep early hours, or——' The shrug said the rest. And she had sold some of her diamonds and obeyed. Of course, it was an awful nuisance, but she must put up with it for a winter in order to get well. As soon as she was well, she would go back, and take another engagement! She had promised herself to be dancing again at the Ambassadeurs by May.

"But when May had come, she was no better. And travelling was expensive, and all places were alike to her since she was forbidden to return to Paris. She had disposed of more jewellery, and looked forward to the autumn. And in the autumn she had looked forward to the spring. So it had gone on.

"At first, while letters came to her sometimes, telling her how she was missed, the banishment had been alleviated; later, in her loneliness, it had grown frightful. Monsieur, her soul — that little soul that pleasure had held dumb—cried out, under misfortune, like a homeless child for its mother. Her longing took her by the throat, and the doctor had difficulty in dissuading her from going to meet death by the first train. She did not suspect that she was doomed in any case; he thought it kinder to deceive her. He had preached 'Patience, mademoiselle, a little patience!' And she had wrung her hands, but yielded—sustained by the hope of a future that she was never to know.

"By this time the last of her jewels were sold, and most of the money had been spent. The fact alarmed her when she dwelt upon it, but she did not dwell

upon it very often—in the career of Little-Flower-of-the-Wood, so many pecuniary crises had been righted at the last moment. No, although there was nobody now to whom she could turn for help, it was not anxiety that bowed her; the thoughts by which she was stricken, as she sauntered feebly on the eternal promenade, was that in Paris they no longer talked of her, and that her prettiness had passed away. She was forgotten, ugly! The tragedy of her exile was that.

"Now it was that she found out the truth—she learnt that there was no chance of her recovering. She made no reproaches for the lies that had been told her; she recognised that they had been well meant. All she said was, 'I am glad that it is not too late; I may see Paris still before the curtain tumbles—I shall go at once."

"Not many months of life remained to her, but they were more numerous than her louis. It was an unfamiliar Paris that she returned to! She had quitted the Paris of the frivolous and fêted; she came back to the Paris of the outcast poor. The world that she had remembered gave her no welcome—she peered through its shut windows, friendless in the streets.

"Gentlemen, last night all the customers had gone from the little Restaurant au Loup Blanc but a woman in a shabby opera-cloak—a woman with tragic eyes, and half a lung. She sat fingering her glass of beer absently, though the clock over the desk pointed to a quarter to midnight, and at midnight beer-drinkers are no longer desired in the Loup Blanc. But she

was a stranger; it was concluded that she didn't know!

"Adolphe approached to enlighten her; 'Madame wishes to order supper?' he asked.

"The stranger shook her head.

"'Madame will have champagne?'

"'Don't bother me!' said the woman.

"Adolphe nodded towards the bock contemptuously. 'After midnight, only champagne is served here,' he said; 'it is the rule of the house.'

"'A fig for the rule!' scoffed the woman; 'I am going to stop!'

"Adolphe retired and sought the 'patron,' and Dupont advanced to her with dignity.

"'Madame is plainly ignorant of our arrangements,' he began; 'at twelve o'clock one cannot remain for the cost of a bock—the restaurant becomes very gay.'

"'So I believe,' she said; 'I want to see the gaiety.'

"'It also becomes expensive. I will explain! During the evening we serve a dinner at two francs for our customers in the neighbourhood — and until twelve o'clock one may order bocks, or what one wishes, at strictly moderate prices. But at twelve o'clock there is a change; we have quite a different class of trade. People who amuse themselves arrive here to sup and to dance. As a supper-house, the Loup Blanc is known to all Paris.'

"'One lives and learns!' said the woman ironically; 'but I know more about the Loup Blanc than you seem to think. I can tell you the history of its success.'

"'Madame?' Dupont regarded her with haughty eyes.

"'Three years ago, monsieur, the Loup Blanc stood where it stands now, but there was no "different class of trade" at twelve o'clock, and no champagne. The dinners at two francs for your customers in the neighbourhood were all that you aspired to! You did the cooking yourself in those days, and you did not sport a white waistcoat and a gold watch-chain.'

"'These things have nothing to do with it. You will comply with the rule, or you must go. All is said!'

"'One night Little-Flower-of-the-Wood had a whim to sup here,' continued the woman, as if he had not spoken. 'She had passed the place in her carriage and fancied its flag, or its flower-pot—or she wanted to do something new. Anyhow, she had the whim! I see you have the telephone behind the desk now, monsieur—your little restaurant was not on the telephone when she wished to reserve a table that night; she had to reserve it by a messenger.'

"'Well, well?' said Dupont, impatiently.

"'But you were a shrewd man, you saw your luck and leapt at it—and when she entered with her party, you received her like a queen! You had even hired a piano, you said, in case Little-Flower-of-the-Wood might wish to play. I notice that a piano is in the corner still—no doubt you soon saved the money to buy one.'

"'How do you know all this, you?' Dupont's gaze was curious.

"'Her freak pleased her, and she came again and

again—and others came, just to see her here. Then you recognised that your customers from the neighbourhood were out of place among the spendthrifts, who yielded more profit in a night than all the two-franc dinners in a month; you said, "At twelve o'clock there shall be no more bocks, only champagne!" I had made your restaurant famous—and you introduced the great rule that you now command me to obey!'

"'You? You are Little-Flower-of-the-Wood?'

"'Yes, it was I who did it for you,' she said quietly. 'And the restaurant flourished after Little-Flower-of-the-Wood had faded. Well, to-night I want to spend an hour here again, for the sake of what I used to be. Time brings changes, you understand, and I cannot conform with the great rule.' She opened the opera cloak, trembling, and he saw that beneath it Little-Flower-of-the-Wood was in rags.

"'I am very poor and ill,' she went on. 'I have been away in the South for more than two years; they told me I ought to stop there, but I had to see Paris once more! What does it matter? I shall finish here a little sooner, that is all. I lodge close by, in a garret. The garret is very dirty, but I hear the music from the Bal Tabarin across the way. I like that—I persuade myself I am living the happy life I used to have. When I am tossing sleepless, I hear the noise and laughter of the crowd coming out, and blow kisses to them in the dark. You see, although one is forgotten, one cannot forget. I pray that their laughter will come up to me right at the end, before I die!'

"'You cannot afford to enter Tabarin's?' faltered Dupont; 'you are so stony as that?'

"'So stony as that!' she said. 'And I repeat that to-night I want to pass an hour in the midst of the life I loved. Monsieur, remember how you came to make your rule! Break it for me once! Let me stay here to-night for a bock!'

"Dupont is a restaurateur, but he is also a man. He took both her hands, and the waiters were astonished to perceive that the 'patron' was crying.

"'My child,' he stammered, 'you will sup here as my guest.'

"Adolphe set before her champagne that she sipped feverishly, and a supper that she was too ill to eat. And cabs came rattling from the Grands Boulevards with boisterous men and women who no longer recalled her name—and with other 'Little-Flowers-of-the-Wood,' who had sprung up since her day.

"The woman who used to reign there sat among them, looking back, until the last jest was bandied, and the last bottle was drained. Then she bade her host 'good-bye,' and crawled home—to the garret where she 'heard the music of the ball'; the garret where she 'prayed that the laughter would come up to her right at the end, before she died'!"

Janiaud finished the absinthe, and lurched to his feet. "That's all."

"Great Scott," said the Editor, "if he could only write in English! But——but it's very pitiable, she may starve there; something ought to be done. . . . Can you tell us where she is living, monsieur?"

The poet shrugged his shoulders. "Is there no

satisfying you? You asked me for the history of the Loup Blanc; and there are things that even I do not know; however, I have done my best! I cannot say where the lady is living, but I can tell you where she was born." He pointed, with a drunken laugh, to his glass: "There!"

XIII

DEAD VIOLETS

"If you ever want me, write to me—I'd come to you from the end of the world!" he had said; and she had answered, "I shall always want you, but I shall never write, and you must never come." She was married.

It was in May that they parted; they parted on the day of her owning that she cared for him. The virtue was hers, not his; yet because he loved her, and realised that she was too good a woman to defy her conscience and be happy, he acquiesced in her decision—refrained from pleading to her, refrained from trying to see her again.

His only indulgence was to send violets to her home in Paris for the ninth of December; the ninth of December was her birthday, and violets, she had once told him, were her favourite flower. He did not scribble any greeting with them, did not even enclose a card; he was sure that she would know who sent them, and it lightened his pain to feel that she would know. Indeed, to recall himself to her thus mutely was a joy, the only joy that he had experienced since the day of the "good-bye"; almost it was as if he were going to her, that moment in the London florist's when

he held the flowers that would reach her hands; she did not seem so lost to him for the moment, the separation did not seem so blank.

The next year, also, he sent violets for the ninth of December. His emotions, it is true, were less vivid this time, but he was glad to show her that he was faithful; besides, the prettiness of the reminder pleased him.

And the third year he sent them chiefly because he felt that she would be disappointed if he appeared to forget.

So it had grown to be his custom to send violets to her for her birthday, though what was once an impulse of devotion was now a lie—the weakness of a sentimentalist reluctant to wound a woman, and his self-esteem, by admitting that he had exaggerated the importance of his feelings. And each December the woman welcomed the lie with smiles and tears, and believed that he loved her still.

When five years had passed he met her again. It was in Bond Street, and he had sent the violets to Paris two or three days before.

"Phil!"

As he turned and saw her, he thought how much better-looking she used to be. (She was young still, no more than thirty, but she had longed for him on every day of the five years, and her tears had blotted some of the girlishness from her face.) As he turned and saw her, the woman thought how his mouth had twitched when he said, "I'd come to you from the end of the world." It is among the unacknowledged truths that sentimentality may create as much ferment as en-

during love, and he had suffered even more violently than she, though he had not suffered so long.

"What are you doing here in December—you're the last person I should have expected to see?" she said.

"I go South to-morrow."

"Lucky man!"

"And you?"

"We're living here now."

"Really? You've left Paris? How long?"

"We've been here since October; we're flat-hunting."

"Oh!"

They stood looking into each other's eyes, neither knowing what to say next. Her heart was thumping terribly, and she felt very happy and very frightened. More than once she had been tempted to write to him that her courage had broken down; all resistance seemed to have left her as she stood looking into his eyes again.

"Flats," she added in a voice of composure, "are so abominably dear in London."

"Where are you staying?"

"In apartments—Bayswater."

"Bayswater must be a change from Neuilly? It was a jolly little place you had in Neuilly!"

"It was rather jolly, wasn't it? My—my husband's people wished us to come over; they thought they might put him into something over here. Of course, in Paris it was cheap, but there were no prospects."

"I understand."

"There's some talk of a secretaryship if a company is floated." It was so natural to be telling him every-

thing now they had met. "It would be a very good thing for us."

"I hope it'll come off."

"Yes. . . . Well, how are you? I'm always seeing your name—'one of the novels of the year'!"

"They aren't so good as the novels that nobody read."

"Not quite. Why?"

"I'm turning out what's wanted now. One has to live."

"Yes. . . . Still, isn't it a pity to—to——"

"Oh, one gets tired!" he said. "Ideals make lonely dwelling places. . . . Let me take you somewhere and give you some tea."

"I ought to go to some shops; I'm up West to work."

"'Work'? Spending money?"

"Earning it—I'm doing fashion articles."

"You? Do you mean it? Well, come and have some tea first."

It was very early, and there were vacant tables in the alcoves. As he sat opposite her, Orlebar thought what a fraud it was that the things one craved for only came to pass when one had grown resigned to doing without them. How he had besought God for some such chance as this—what a spectacle he had made of himself about her during six unforgettable months! And now he was sipping his tea without emotion, and observing that her clothes compared unfavourably with the other women's in the room! In that moment Orlebar saw the humiliating truth—knew that he had lived his great love down and

deceived himself for years. But he didn't want to see —he preferred to deceive himself now. It is often more congenial to be an ass than to acknowledge that you have been one.

"It's a long time since we had tea together, Lucy!"

"Yes," she said.

"Well, what have you got to tell me?"

"I think I told you everything in a breath; at least—— What have you been doing all the time?"

"Trying to kill it."

"You're working in London now, eh?"

"Yes, I've chambers in the Temple. Rather swagger compared with the little shanty in the Rue Ravignan! How did you come to take up journalism?"

"Someone suggested it—and my twaddle seemed to do. It's pretty sickening."

"What's the idea—it doesn't pay very well, does it?"

"Not on my paper; I get a guinea a week, but—— Oh, why should I bore you with all that?"

"You don't 'bore' me, Lucy."

"Well, I—I prefer to do it! You don't know everything; his people have never forgiven his marriage —they think marriage has handicapped him so badly— and, you may be sure, they blame me more than him; it's always the daughter-in-law's fault! We've only their allowance to live on—it isn't pleasant to be kept by people who resent your existence!"

"Poor little woman! No, I didn't know."

"Oh, it's not so bad as all that! Still, I'm glad to be making something, even if it's only a guinea a

week. I don't feel so uncomfortable when I meet them, not such a dead weight. We have to go there to dinner on Sundays, and it's rather awful—they tell me what a splendid career he would have had if he hadn't married!"

"Damn 'em!" said Orlebar.

"I do—every Sunday afternoon, from the soup to the coffee! Well"—she leant her elbows on the table, and smiled—"have I changed much?"

"No," he said, bravely. "But—but this is brutal hard lines—I didn't dream that you had things like that to put up with! You always seemed so light-hearted in Paris."

"I didn't meet his people in Paris! Besides, things alter in five years; I think—— Oh!" she broke off, "it's ridiculous to talk about it to you, I don't know why I'm doing it!"

"Have you anybody else to talk to?"

"No," she admitted, slowly, "that's it! I can't talk to *him* because——well, they're his own people, for one thing; and, besides——well, of course, marriage *has* handicapped him, and I suppose he knows it as well as they do."

"Do you mean——? . . . You don't get on now?"

She gave a shrug, and traced lines on the cloth with her spoon; "What do you suppose I mean?"

"I am so sorry for you, dear!"

"Oh, I daresay it's my fault! I suppose I don't do all I ought to make up for what I've cost him; it's difficult to do all you ought when——when——" her voice snapped—"when you sometimes wish to God that you hadn't done so much!"

"Perhaps you'd have done better to come to me, after all," said Orlebar heavily; he couldn't think of anything else to say.

"I tried to be a good woman—I thought you'd forget me; *I* wanted to forget *you!* Why didn't you let me forget you? Why did you send me those flowers every year?"

"Were you vexed with me for sending them?"

"No."

"I'm glad. I sent some to Paris the other day."

"Did you? I wondered if you would; I've been rather impatient for my birthdays. What a confession—a woman impatient for her birthdays! I never meant to see you any more, though; I swore I wouldn't!"

"But you wanted to, didn't you?"

Her cup was neglected now; she leant back in the chair, her hands clenched in her lap.

"Didn't you?" he repeated.

"Oh, don't!" she said in her throat. "I can't bear it, Phil!"

"What?"

"The life—everything! I'm tired of it all."

"Chuck it!" he muttered; "come away with me to-morrow!"

She didn't speak; she tried to believe that she was struggling. The pause seemed to Orlebar to last a long time while he sat wishing that he hadn't said it. The waitress inquired if they required anything else, and put the check on the table, and took her tip. The place was filling, and a ladies' orchestra began to twang their mandolines.

"Do you want me?" she asked, raising her eyes.

"Do I 'want' you!" What else could he reply?

"Very well, then." She nodded. "I'll go! . . . Let's get out of this—do you mind?—my head aches."

He knew dismally that her consent had come too late, that there would be nothing now to compensate him for the scandal—no months, or weeks, or even minutes of rapture. They got up, and he put the half-crown on the desk, and followed her into the street.

After they had strolled a few yards in silence, he said, as it seemed obligatory, "You've made me very happy!"

She answered, "I'll try to!" He wished that she had said anything else—it was painful.

"We'd better have a cab. Where shall we go—will you come to the Temple?"

"I think I'd like to go home; you can drive there with me."

"Can you get away in the morning—or shall I put it off?" he asked in the hansom.

"No, I can get away—he won't be back till the evening."

"Back from where?"

"He went down to his people to-day—they're in Brighton now. What time's the train?"

"Ten o'clock—from Charing Cross; I was going by Folkestone and Boulogne. Are you a bad sailor?"

"No, I like it. We'll meet at Charing Cross, then?"

"Yes; in the first-class waiting-room—if you're sure it's not too early for you?"

"It's all right. . . . Is it real, Phil? Half an hour ago we hadn't seen each other; and now—it's to be all

our lives! Oh, I hope you'll never be sorry! I wonder?"

"That's unjust."

"Is it?" Her eyes reminded him that he ought to kiss her, and he bent his head. . . . He pitied her acutely as he felt her tears on his face—hated himself for lying to her.

"Cheer up, dearest! Remember how we care for each other," he said.

The effort of affecting joy wore him out as they drove on; intensely he wished that they had found a quicker cab; he wanted a drink badly, wanted to light a pipe and give way to his gloom. Her hand, which he clasped, seemed to him to grow larger and heavier through the long drive; and when at last they parted at her door, he thanked heaven for the right to heave a sigh, for the freedom to look as moody as he felt.

Five years ago! If it had only happened five—four years ago! The pathos of the situation took him by the throat. What a rotten thing life was! Again his mind reverted to the months when he had been torn with longing for her—the longing just to watch her, to listen to her, no matter what she said. And now he had kissed her for the first time—as a duty! That abandonment of despair had played havoc with him, yet he wished that it had lasted—it would have been worth while, he thought. God! the ecstasy that would have been thrilling in him now if he had suffered like that until this afternoon!

At the club he ordered a "big whisky and a small soda."

"You're off to Rome soon, aren't you?" said a man

presently. "You pampered novelists have all the luck!"

"Yes," said Orlebar. The man was the Editor of a daily paper; it occurred to the novelist that he was about to provide the paper with some surprising "copy"; also that the editorial greeting would be less informal when they met again.

What a deuce of a lot of talk there would be! the damage it was going to do him socially! Socially? It would injure him financially, too; he recognised it for the first time as he surveyed the room. There was McKinnell, of the *Mayfair*, ragging a waiter because the toast was cold; Orlebar's new novel was to run through the *Mayfair* before it came out in book form. If he knew anything of McKinnell, that highly respectable gentleman would refuse to pollute the pages of his journal with the fiction of a co-respondent. And McKinnell's refusal wouldn't be singular, though he might express it with singular offensiveness. Even among good fellows, it would be, "Sorry, but we daren't run you just now in a paper for household reading—we should get no end of protests. Awful rot, of course, but there it is!" Five hundred pounds gone! Five hundred pounds was a large sum; he was no millionaire.

And his books? The sale of his next books would drop in this virtuous country when he had outraged the Eleventh Commandment. If she had been "Lady" somebody the public would have called the case "romantic"—it would have been a big advertisement then—but without the glamour of a title they would only call it "disgraceful." For one reader gained by the scandal, half a dozen would be lost.

What a calamity, his turning into Bond Street this afternoon!

And how she had jumped at him, he thought with sudden resentment; she hadn't needed much persuasion! He had been an idiot to exalt her into a heroine at the beginning—since it had been fated that he was to ruin himself, he might at any rate have done it while he was in love with her! And he hadn't even the excuse of youth now; he was making a mess of his life when he was old enough to know better, when he did know better—he was ruining himself against his will! He had another whisky-and-soda, and wondered if there was any chance of his hearing that she had changed her mind. Confound it, she didn't know his address! And anyhow there would be no chance; what was she giving up—a husband who didn't want her. If she had had a child, it would have been a different thing. A pity she hadn't a family! "A husband who didn't want her." And he, Philip Orlebar, was going to take her off his hands! Oh, what a mug's game! If he hadn't gone in to have his hat ironed, he wouldn't have met her. And it hadn't really needed ironing either!

He did not remain long in the club when dinner was over. After all, he had mentioned that his rooms were in the Temple, and the hope that she might try to communicate with him lingered in spite of commonsense. At the gate he looked towards the porter eagerly, but the porter said nothing, and the shock of disappointment told Orlebar how strong the hope had been.

His portmanteaus were half-packed, and he spent the

evening straining to catch the sound of the bell. Once it rang, but the visitor was only a bore who had dropped in for a drink and a chat. Orlebar loathed the beaming face as he gave him welcome, and, like the Editor, the bore made envious reference to the morrow's journey; he "wished he were in the author's shoes!" Orlebar was at infinite pains to affect high spirits, for it was undesirable that the man should say afterwards, "I was with him the night before he bolted with her—the poor beggar seemed to have an awful hump." But presently the man said, "You seem a cup low to-night, old chap?" The melancholy stroke of the Temple clock had never sounded so lugubrious as in the hours that followed.

When he woke in the morning, Orlebar remembered that there ought to be a half-bottle of Pommery in the bathroom, and he had it in lieu of tea, with some biscuits. The wine lightened his mood a little; it no longer seemed so hopelessly impossible to conceal his regret; and when he strode into the station, it was with a very fair show of impatience. But his heart leapt as he saw that she wasn't there. He sat on a couch, glancing alternately at the clock and the doors, and praying that she wouldn't come.

She entered just as he was feeling sanguine.

"My darling!" he murmured, "here you are!"

"Am I late?"

"I was beginning to be afraid. But there's time enough—I've got the tickets. Where's your luggage?"

"They've taken it through."

"We'd better go, then."

Among the bustle on the platform he could say little

more than, "How pale you are!" and "Which are your trunks?" Then they were alone, and the door had been slammed, and the train moved out.

"Darling!" he said again. "Well?"

"Well?"

"It seems too good to be true." His tone was lifeless.

"Does it!"

"Doesn't it to you?"

"I think it's true," she said, with a tired smile.

"How pale you are!" he repeated. "Didn't you sleep?"

"Not much. I've been wondering."

"'Wondering'? What?"

"Whether I ought to have said 'no.' What would you have done if I'd said 'no,' Phil? Really?"

"What *can* a man do? I suppose I should have had to put up with it."

She didn't reply for a moment. She was gazing straight before her, with a frown.

"Do you think me a bad woman, Phil?"

"I think you're the best woman I've ever known."

"It looks like it, doesn't it!"

"The force of circumstances! If you had met me before you met him——"

"But I didn't. It's pretty mean of me to spoil his life, isn't it?"

"I didn't know that he cared so much about you?"

"Oh"—she hesitated—"we've quarrelled, like everybody else, but—but he's very fond of me. Of course, it'll be an awful blow. I can't forget it—I've been thinking of it ever since."

"It just depends . . . the thing you've got to con-

sider is which way you'll be happier yourself. If—I don't know! I suppose there are women who *can't* go wrong and be happy!"

"I'm thinking of my duty," she faltered. "You know I love you, don't you? I want you to know it, to keep remembering it all the time. I love you, I love you, I love you! But——" She waited with her heart in her throat.

"But what?" he asked, moodily. "What were you going to say?" Her eyes closed with pain.

"Eh?" he said.

"There are his people," she stammered; "they'll feel the disgrace so much. I've been considering everything—I—I didn't know what a wrench it would be."

"You'll get over it."

"I'm not sure? Perhaps I shall always——? Do you think I've . . . made a mistake?" Again she waited breathlessly. If he would only seize her in his arms! If he would only cry, "Let them all go the devil, and remember *me!*"

"If you feel like that," he said feebly, "of course I hardly—I hardly know what I can say to you."

"You can't *think* of anything to say?" she pleaded. "There's nothing—nothing I'm overlooking?"

"There's time; one gets over anything in time," he said incautiously.

"Oh, my God!" she moaned.

She turned to the window, her face as white as a dead woman's. The terror was confirmed that had stolen on her in the cab, that had haunted her throughout the night—confirmed by his tones, his looks, by every answer he had made to her halting falsehoods;

he had learnt to do without her, she had given herself unsought! In the agony of shame that overwhelmed her she could have thrown herself from the compartment; and, mark this! it was only her love for him that restrained her—she would not reproach him by deed, or word, he shouldn't be burdened by the knowledge of what he had made her suffer.

"Well," he said, "it's not too late."

"No," she muttered, "I can't go!"

His pulses jumped; for an instant he couldn't trust his voice.

"You must do as you like, I don't want to take you against your will. . . . If you wish it, you can go back from Folkestone; I suppose—if he's away—there'd be no harm done, would there?"

"You're not angry with me? You won't mind too much!"

"Don't worry about *me*—I want *you* to be happy. To tell you the truth, I think you're right—you're not the woman to kick over the traces, you'd be too cut up about it. Go back and make the best of a bad business—it'll be easier for you to bear than the other, anyhow! We'll see about a train for you as soon as we get in."

At Folkestone Harbour they ascertained that there would be an express to Charing Cross at two o'clock, and he paced the platform with her till it was time to say "good-bye." Exhilaration had given him an appetite, but she answered that she wasn't hungry; so, as he had missed his boat, he decided to drive to an hotel on the Leas and have an elaborate luncheon when she had gone. His glances at the playbills on the

walls showed him that *San Toy* was at the Pleasure Gardens, and he foresaw himself cheerfully among the audience in the evening. He was feeling on a sudden twenty years younger, and, hard as he strove to acquire a manner of tender gravity, she discerned the improvement in his spirits every time he spoke.

Her train arrived in town at a few minutes to four, and she re-entered the lodging-house some hours earlier than her husband. But the fire had gone out, and she had to wait shivering till it was lighted before she could burn the note that she had left on the mantelpiece for him. A little box addressed to her had been delivered during her absence; when the slatternly servant left her alone at last, the woman dared to touch it—and fell to sobbing as if her heart would burst. It contained the violets that Orlebar had sent in token of his love.

The box had been redirected from Paris. Owing to the delay, the violets, now that they had reached her, were quite dead.

XIV

THE FAIRY POODLE

They were called "The two children" because they were so unpractical; even in bohemia, where practicality is the last virtue to flourish, their improvidence was surprising; but really they were not children at all—they had been married for three years, though to watch their billing and cooing, you would have supposed them to be bride and bridegroom.

Julien and Juliette had fallen in love and run to the Mairie as joyously as if chateaubriands were to be gathered from the boughs in the Jardin des Buttes-Chaumont; and since then their home had been the studio under the slates, where they were often penniless. Indeed, if it had not been for the intermittent mercies of Madame Cochard, the concierge, they would have starved under the slates. However, they were sure that the pictures which Julien painted would some day make him celebrated, and that the fairy-tales which Juliette weaved would some day be as famous as Hans Andersen's. So they laughed, and painted and scribbled, and spent their money on bonbons, instead of saving it for bread; and when they had no dinner, they would kiss

each other, and say, "There is a good time coming"; and they were called "The two children," as you know.

But even the patience of Madame Cochard was taxed when Juliette brought back the poodle.

She found him—a strayed, muddy, unhappy little poodle—in the Rue de Rivoli one wet afternoon in November, and what more natural than that she should immediately bear him home, and propose to give him a bath, and adopt him? It was the most natural thing in the world, since she was Juliette, yet this Madame Cochard, who objected to a dog on her stairs as violently as if it were a tiger, was furious.

"Is it not enough," she cried, "that you are the worst tenants in the house, you two—that you are always behindhand with your rent, and that I must fill your mouths out of my own purse? Is a concierge an Angel from Heaven, do you think, that you expect her to provide also for lost dogs?"

"Dear, kind Madame Cochard," cooed Juliette, "you will learn to love the little creature as if it were your own child! See how trustfully he regards you!"

"It is a fact," added Julien; "he seems to take to her already! It is astonishing how quickly a dog recognises a good heart."

"Good heart, or not," exclaimed the concierge, "it is to be understood that I do not consent to this outrage. The poodle shall not remain!"

"Be discreet," urged Juliette, "I entreat you to be discreet, for your own sake; if you must have the whole truth, he is a fairy poodle!"

"What do you say?" ejaculated Madame Cochard.

"He is a fairy poodle, and if we treat him ungener-

ously, we shall suffer. Remember the history of the Lodgers, the Concierge, and the Pug!"

"I have never heard of such a history," returned Madame Cochard; "and I do not believe that there ever was one."

"She has never heard the history of the Lodgers, the Concierge, and the Pug!" cried Juliette. "Oh, then listen, madame! Once upon a time there were two lodgers, a young man and his wife, and they were so poor that often they depended on the tenderness of the concierge to supply them with a dinner."

"Did they also throw away their good money on bonbons and flowers?" asked Madame Cochard, trying her utmost to look severe.

"It is possible," admitted Juliette, who was perched on the table, with the dirty little animal in her lap, "for though they are our hero and heroine, I cannot pretend that they were very wise. Well, this concierge, who suffered badly from rheumatism and stairs, had sometimes a bit of a temper, so you may figure yourself what a fuss she raised when the poor lodgers brought home a friendless pug to add to their embarrassments. However——"

"There is no 'however,'" persisted Madame Cochard; "she raises a fuss, and that is all about it!"

"Pardon, dear madame," put in Julien, "you confuse the cases; we are now concerned with the veracious history of the pug, not the uncertain future of the poodle."

"Quite so," said Juliette. "She raised a terrible fuss and declared that the pug should go, but finally she melted to it and made it welcome. And then, what do

you suppose happened? Why, it turned out to be an enchanted prince, who rewarded them all with wealth and happiness. The young man's pictures were immediately accepted by the Salon—did I mention that he was an artist? The young woman's stories—did I tell you that she wrote stories?—became so much the fashion that her head swam with joy; and the concierge—the dear, kind concierge—was changed into a beautiful princess, and never had to walk up any stairs again as long as she lived. Thus we see that one should never forbid lodgers to adopt a dog!"

"Thus we see that they do well to call you 'a pair of children,'" replied Madame Cochard, "that is what we see! Well, well, keep the dog, since you are so much bent on it; only I warn you that if it gives me trouble, it will be sausages in no time! I advise you to wash it without delay, for a more deplorable little beast I never saw."

Julien and Juliette set to work with delight, and after he was bathed and dry, the alteration in the dog was quite astonishing. Although he did not precisely turn into a prince, he turned into a poodle of the most fashionable aspect. Obviously an aristocrat among poodles—a poodle of high estate. The metamorphosis was so striking that a new fear assailed his rescuers, the fear that it might be dishonest of them to retain him—probably some great lady was disconsolate at his loss!

Sure enough! A few days later, when Sanquereau, the sculptor, called upon them, he said:

"By the way, did I not hear that you had found a poodle, my children? Doubtless it is the poodle for which they advertise. See!" And he produced a

copy of a journal in which "a handsome reward" was promised for the restoration of an animal which resembled their protégé to a tuft.

The description was too accurate for "the children" to deceive themselves, and that afternoon Juliette carried the dog to a magnificent house which was nothing less than the residence of the Comtesse de Grand Écusson.

She was left standing in a noble hall while a flunkey bore the dog away. Then another flunkey bade her follow him upstairs; and in a salon which was finer than anything that Juliette had ever met with outside the pages of a novel, the Countess was reclining on a couch with the poodle in her arms.

"I am so grateful to you for the recovery of my darling," said the great lady; "my distress has been insupportable. Ah, naughty, naughty Racine!" She made a pretence of chastising the poodle on the nose.

"I can understand it, madame," said Juliette, much embarrassed.

"Where did you find him? And has he been well fed, well taken care of? I hope he has not been sleeping in a draught?"

"Oh, indeed, madame, he has been nourished like a beloved child. Doubtless, not so delicately as with madame, but——"

"It was most kind of you," said the lady. "I count myself blessed that my little Racine fell into such good hands. Now as to the reward, what sum would you think sufficient?"

Juliette looked shy. "I thank you, madame, but we could not accept anything," she faltered.

"What?" exclaimed the Countess, raising her eyebrows in surprise, "you cannot accept anything; how is that?"

"Well," said Juliette, "it would be base to accept money for a simple act of honesty. It is true that we did not wish to part with the dog—we had grown to love him—but, as to our receiving payment for giving him up, that is impossible."

The Countess laughed merrily. "What a funny child you are! And, who are 'we'—you and your parents?"

"Oh, no," said Juliette; "my parents are in heaven, madame; but I am married."

"Your husband must be in heaven, too," said the Countess, who was a charming woman.

"Ah," demurred Juliette, "but although I have a warm heart, I have also a healthy appetite, and he is not rich; he is an artist."

"I must go to see his pictures some day," replied the Comtesse de Grand Écusson. "Give me the address—and believe that I am extremely grateful to you!"

It need not be said that Juliette skipped home on air after this interview. The hint of such patronage opened the gates of paradise to her, and the prospect was equally dazzling to Julien. For fully a week they talked of nothing but a visit from the Comtesse de Grand Écusson, having no suspicion that fine ladies often forgot their pretty promises as quickly as they made them.

And the week, and a fortnight, and a month passed, and at last the expectation faded; they ceased to indulge their fancies of a carriage-and-pair dashing into the street with a Lady Bountiful. And what was much more

serious, Madame Cochard ceased to indulge their follies. The truth was that she had never pardoned the girl for refusing to accept the proffered reward; the delicacy that prompted the refusal was beyond her comprehension, and now that the pair were in arrears with their rent again, she put no bridle on her tongue.

"It appears to me that it would have been more honourable to accept money for a poodle than to owe money to a landlord," she grunted. "It must be perfectly understood that if the sum is not forthcoming on the first of January, you will have to get out. I have received my instructions, and I shall obey them. On the first day of January, my children, you pay, or you go! Le bon Dieu alone knows what will become of you, but that is no affair of mine. I expect you will die like the babes in the wood, for you are no more fit to make a living than a cow is fit to fly."

"Dear Madame Cochard," they answered, peacefully, "why distress yourself about us? The first of January is more than a week distant; in a week we may sell a picture, or some fairy tales—in a week many things may happen!" And they sunned themselves on the boulevard the same afternoon with as much serenity as if they had been millionaires.

Nevertheless, they did not sell a picture or some fairy tales in the week that followed—and the first of January dawned with relentless punctuality, as we all remember.

In the early morning, when Madame Cochard made her ascent to the attic—her arms folded inexorably, the glare of a creditor in her eye—she found that Juliette had already been out. (If you can believe me, she had

been out to waste her last two francs on an absurd tie for Julien!)

"Eh bien," demanded the concierge sternly, "where is your husband? I am here, as arranged, for the rent; no doubt he has it ready on the mantelpiece for me?"

"He is not in," answered Juliette coaxingly, "and I am sorry to say we have received disappointments. The fact is there is something wrong in the construction of a story of which I had immense hopes—it needs letting out at the waist, and a tuck put in at the hem. When I have made the alterations, I am sure it will fit some journal elegantly."

"All this passes forbearance!" exclaimed Madame Cochard. "Well, you have thoroughly understood, and all is said—you will vacate your lodging by evening! So much grace I give you; but at six o'clock you depart promptly, or you will be ejected! And do not reckon on me to send any meal up here during the day, for you will not get so much as a crust. What is it that you have been buying there?"

"It is a little gift for Julien; I rose early to choose it before he woke, and surprise him; but when I returned he was out."

"A gift?" cried the concierge. "You have no money to buy food, and you buy a gift for your husband! What for?"

"What for?" repeated Juliette wonderingly. "Why, because it is New Year's Day! And that reminds me—I wish you the compliments of the season, madame; may you enjoy many happy years!"

"Kind words pay no bills," snapped the concierge. "I have been lenient far too long—I have my own

reputation to consider with the landlord. By six o'clock, bear in mind!" And then, to complete her resentment, what should happen but that Julien entered bearing a bouquet!

To see Julien present Juliette with the roses, and to watch Juliette enchant Julien with the preposterous tie, was as charming a little comedy of improvidence as you would be likely to meet with in a lifetime.

"Mon Dieu!" gasped Madame Cochard, purple with indignation, "it is, indeed, well that you are leaving here, monsieur—a madhouse is the fitting address for you! You have nothing to eat, and you buy roses for your wife! What for?"

"What for?" echoed Julien astonished. "Why, because it is New Year's Day! And I take the opportunity to wish you the compliments of the season, madame—may your future be as bright as Juliette's eyes!"

"By six o'clock!" reiterated the concierge, who was so exasperated that she could barely articulate. "By six o'clock you will be out of the place!" And to relieve her feelings, she slammed the door with such violence that half a dozen canvases fell to the floor.

"Well, this is a nice thing," remarked Julien, when she had gone. "It looks to me, mignonne, as if we shall sleep in the Bois, with the moon for an eider-down!"

"At least you shall have a comfy pillow, sweetheart," cried Juliette, drawing his head to her breast.

"My angel, there is none so soft in the Elysée! And as we have nothing for déjeûner in the cupboard, I propose that we breakfast now on kisses."

"Ah, Julien!" whispered the girl, as she folded him in her arms.

"Ah, Juliette!" It was as if they had been married that morning. "And yet," continued the young man, releasing her at last, "to own the truth, your kisses are not satisfying as a menu; they are the choicest of hors d'œuvres—they leave one hungry for more!"

They were still making love when Sanquereau burst in to wish them a Happy New Year.

"How goes it, my children?" he cried. "You look like a honeymoon, I swear! Am I in the way, or may I breakfast with you?"

"You are not in the way, mon vieux," returned Julien; "but I shall not invite you to breakfast with me, because my repast consists of Juliette's lips."

"Mon Dieu!" said Sanquereau. "So you are broke? Well, in my chequered career I have breakfasted on much worse fare than yours."

At this reply, Juliette blushed with all the bashfulness of a bride, and Julien endeavoured to assume the air of a man of the world.

"Tell me," he said; "we are in difficulties about the rent—have you by chance a louis that you could lend me?"

Sanquereau turned out his pockets, like the good fellow he was, but he could produce no more than a sou. "What a bother!" he cried; "I would lend you a louis if I had it as readily as a cigarette-paper, but you see how I am situated. On my honour, it rends my heart to have to refuse."

"You are a gallant comrade!" said Julien, much

touched. "Come back and sup with us this evening, and we will open the New Year with a festivity!"

"Hein? But there will be no supper," faltered Juliette.

"That's true," said Julien; "there will be no supper—I was forgetting. Still—who knows? There is plenty of time; I shall have an idea. Perhaps, I may be able to borrow something from Tricotrin."

"I shall be enchanted," responded Sanquereau; "depend on my arrival! If I am not mistaken, I recognise Tricotrin's voice on the stairs."

His ears had not deceived him; Tricotrin appeared with Pitou at this very moment.

"Greeting, my children!" they cried. "How wags the world? May the New Year bring you laurels and lucre!"

"To you also, dear Gustave and Nicolas," cried "the children." "May your poems and your music ignite the Seine, and may Sanquereau rise to eminence and make statues of you both!"

"In the meantime," added Sanquereau, "can either of you put your hands on a few francs? There is a fine opening for them here!"

"A difference of opinion exists between ourselves and the landlord," Julien explained; "we consider that he should wait for his rent, and he holds a different view. If you could lend us fifteen francs, we might effect a compromise."

The poet and the composer displayed the lining of their pockets as freely as the sculptor had done, but their capital proved to be a sou less than his own. Tears sprang to their eyes as they confessed their

inability to be of use. "We are in despair," they groaned.

"My good, kind friends!" exclaimed Julien, "your sympathy is a noble gift in itself! Join us in a little supper this evening in celebration of the date."

"We shall be delighted," declared Tricotrin and Pitou.

"But—but—" stammered Juliette again, "where is it to come from, this supper—and where shall we be by supper time?"

"Well, our address is on the lap of the gods," admitted Julien, "but while there is life there is hope. Possibly I may obtain a loan from Lajeunie."

Not many minutes had passed before Lajeunie also paid a visit to the attic. "Aha," cried the unsuccessful novelist, as he perceived the company, "well met! My children, my brothers, may your rewards equal your deserts in 1908—may France do honour to your genius!"

"And may Lajeunie be crowned the New Balzac," shouted the assembly; "may his abode be in the Champs Elysées, and his name in the mouth of all the world!"

But, extraordinary as it appears, Lajeunie proved to be as impecunious as the rest there; and he was so much distressed that Julien, deeply moved, said:—

"Come back to supper, Lajeunie, we will drink toasts to the Muses!" And now there were four guests invited to the impracticable supper, and when "the children" were left alone they clapped their hands at the prospect.

"How merry we shall be!" Julien exclaimed; "and awhile ago we talked of passing the night in the Bois!

It only shows you that one can never tell what an hour may bring forth."

"Yes, yes," assented Juliette, blithely; "and as for the supper——"

"We shall not require it till nine o'clock at the earliest."

"And now it is no more than mid-day! Why, there is an eternity for things to arrange themselves!"

"Just so! The sky may rain truffles in such an interval," said the painter. And they drew their chairs closer to the fire, and pretended to each other that they were not hungry.

The hours crept past, and the sunshine waned, and snow began to flutter over Paris. But no truffles fell. By degrees the fire burnt low, and died. To beg for more fuel was impossible, and Juliette shivered a little.

"You are cold, sweetheart," sighed Julien. "I will fetch a blanket from the bed and wrap you in it."

"No," she murmured, "wrap me in your arms—it will be better."

Darker and darker grew the garret, and faster and faster fell the snow. "I have a fancy," said Juliette, breaking a long silence, "that it is the hour in which a fairy should appear to us. Let us look to see if she is coming!"

They peered from the window, but in the twilight no fairy was to be discerned; only an "old clo" man was visible, trudging on his round.

"I declare," cried Julien, "he is the next best thing to your fairy! I will sell my summer suit and my velvet jacket! What do I want of a velvet jacket? Coffee and eggs will be much more cheerful."

"And I," vowed Juliette, "can spare my best hat easily—indeed, it is an encumbrance! If we make Madame Cochard a small peace-offering, she may allow us to remain until the morning."

"What a grand idea! By this means we shall provide ourselves with a night's shelter and the means to entertain our friends as well! Hasten to collect our wardrobe, mignonette, while I crack my throat to make him hear. Hi, hi!"

At the repeated cries the "old clo" man lifted his gaze to the fifth-floor window at last, and in a few minutes Julien and Juliette were kneeling on the boards above a pile of garments, which they raised one by one for his inspection.

"Regard, monsieur," said Julien, "this elegant summer suit! It is almost as good as new! I begin to hesitate to part with it. What shall we say for this elegant summer suit?"

The dealer fingered it disdainfully. "Show me boots," he suggested, "we can do business in boots!"

"Alas!" replied Julien, "the only boots that I possess are on my feet. We will again admire the suit! What do you estimate it at—ten francs?"

"Are you insane, are you a lunatic?" returned the dealer. "To a reckless man it might be worth ten sous. Let us talk of boots!"

"I cannot go barefooted," expostulated Julien. "Juliette, my Heart, do you happen to possess a second pair of boots?"

Juliette shook her head forlornly. "But I have a hat with daisies in it," she said. "Observe, monsieur, the delicate tints of the buds! How like to nature, how

exquisite they are! They make one dream of courtship in the woods. I will take five francs for it!"

"From me I swear you will not take them!" said the "old clo" man. "Boots," he pleaded; "for the love of God, boots!"

"Morbleu, what a passion for boots you have!" moaned the unhappy painter; "they obsess you, they warp your judgment! Can you think of nothing in the world but boots? Look, we come to the gem of the exhibition—a velvet jacket! A jacket like this confers an air of greatness, one could not feel the pinch of poverty in such a jacket. It is, I confess, a little white at the elbows, but such high lights are very effective. And observe the texture—as soft as a darling's cheek!"

The other turned it about with indifferent hands, and "the children" began to realise that he would prove no substitute for a fairy after all. Then, while they watched him with sinking hearts, the door was suddenly opened, and the concierge tottered on the threshold.

"Monsieur, madame!" she panted, with such respect that they stared at each other.

"Eh, bien?"

"A visitor!" She leant against the wall, overwhelmed.

"Who is it?"

"Madame la Comtesse de Grand Écusson!"

Actually! The Countess had kept her word after all, and now she rustled in, before the "old clo" man could be banished. White as a virgin canvas, Julien staggered forward to receive her, a pair of trousers,

which he was too agitated to remember, dangling under his arm. "Madame, this honour!" he stammered; and, making a piteous effort to disguise his beggary, "One's wardrobe accumulates so that, really, in a small ménage, one has no room to——"

"I have suffered from the inconvenience myself, monsieur," said the Countess graciously. "Your charming wife was so kind as to invite me to view your work; and see—my little Racine has come to wish his preservers a Happy New Year!"

And, on the honour of an historian, he brought one! Before they left she had given a commission for his portrait at a thousand francs, and purchased two landscapes, for which a thousand francs more would be paid on the morrow. When Sanquereau, and Lajeunie, and Tricotrin, and Pitou arrived, expecting the worst, they were amazed to discover "the children" valsing round the attic to the music of their own voices.

What *hurras* rang out when the explanation was forthcoming; what loans were promised to the guests, and what a gay quadrille was danced! It was not until the last figure had concluded that Julien and Juliette recognised that, although they would be wealthy in the morning, they were still penniless that night.

"Hélas! but we have no supper after all," groaned Julien.

"Pardon, it is here, monsieur!" shouted Madame Cochard, who entered behind a kingly feast. "Comment, shall the artist honoured by Madame la Comtesse de Grand Écusson have no supper? Pot-au-feu, monsieur; leg of mutton, monsieur; little pâtés, monsieur;

dessert, monsieur; and for each person a bottle of good wine!"

And the justice that was done to it, and the laughter that pealed under the slates! "The children" didn't forget that it was all due to the dog. Juliette raised her glass radiantly:

"Gentlemen!" she cried, "I ask you to drink to the Fairy Poodle!"

XV

THE LADY OF LYONS'

THE jovial solicitor who smacked his clients on the back had absconded, and the minor poet had no longer fifty pounds per annum. Although he was a minor poet, which, strangely enough, is a term of contempt in this country, though we are enjoined to be grateful for even small mercies, he was as human as minor novelists and minor critics, and he suffered. Also he woke; he realised how small had been the world's demand for the wares in which he dealt—he acknowledged that for twenty years he had been living on his little income, not on his little books.

His name was Smith. It was, perhaps, one of the reasons why his poetry was unread. Only a reviewer possessed of unusual courage could have discovered "the great poetry of Mr. Smith." Only a poet devoid of commercial instincts could have failed to adopt a nom de guerre.

In the face of disaster Mr. Smith did not make precisely this reflection, but he reflected painfully that a lack of commercial ability was no longer a matter to be recognised with a smile. He stood among the daffodils in the village garden, and asked Heaven

what would become of him. He was seven-and-thirty; the only craft that he had learnt was useless; and he had to earn his bread-and-cheese.

As Heaven returned no answer, he sought the advice of friends. He was a lovable creature, though a writing man, and his friends were sympathetic. They all invited him to dinner, and assured him warmly that they would bear his necessities in mind. If anything turned up, he might rely upon their telegraphing to him. Being of a trustful disposition, Mr. Smith returned to the daffodils, encouraged.

And they withered while he waited for a telegram.

When they hung their heads, he sought advice again. This time his friends did not invite him to dinner, but they pointed out to him, lest he overlooked it, that he was a poet—in other words, that he was a difficult person to serve. "You have no experience, you see," they said frankly. "You are intelligent, but you have no experience, Robert." When a man is untravelled in the rut that we ourselves tread, we say that he has "no experience."

One afternoon the poet went abroad. The journey cost him a penny, and he travelled from Charing Cross as far as the Bank. He was bound for an office in Lombard Street, and as he called by appointment, a clerk showed him promptly to Mr. Hutton's private room.

The business man who received him had once been a little boy in a sailor suit, and he and Robert had played together in a nursery. To-day he had numerous financial irons in the fire, and one of them required an obedient gentleman to watch it. Affection sug-

gested Robert for the post. The duties were simple, and the salary was slight, but if the iron came out in good condition, there was to be a slice of the iron, too.

They chatted for a long while. Robert was admitted to some confidences about the other irons—the patents, and the shares, and the concessions. All the time that he listened he was seeing the business man as a little boy in a sailor suit again, and was awestruck to hear the little boy talking so glibly of such mysteries. Blankly he felt that he himself had omitted to grow up; he decided that people were right in declaring that he had no experience; it appeared to him suddenly that he had learnt nothing in his life. But, of course, he had learnt many things, though never the most important one—how to make money.

Often they were interrupted by the telephone bell, and during one of the colloquies on the telephone Mr. Hutton seemed depressed. Robert feared he was being browbeaten until he hung up the receiver, and announced, smiling, that he had "made five hundred pounds by that conversation." It was miraculous. Robert had not made five hundred pounds by twenty years of work.

"Let's go out and get a cup of coffee," said Mr. Hutton, and piloted the poet through a maze of alleys to a retiring doorway. "What will you have to drink?" The poet discovered that after two o'clock "a cup of coffee" in the City is generally a synonym for a whisky-and-soda.

The little bar was crowded, and he was surprised at seeing such a number of business men doing nothing

so leisurely. One man to whom he was introduced asked him if he knew how the "House" closed, but he did not even know what it meant. They discoursed in groups, and a strange language; Robert was flooded by compassion for the barmaid. All expounded different views, and all the views were equally unintelligible to him. The only point of unanimity he perceived was the wisdom of having "a fiver each way." As often as anybody entered, the several groups waved hands, and the newcomer accepted a whisky-and-soda with a piece of lemon in it, among the group he fancied best. On leaving, Mr. Hutton remarked that he had "sometimes made as much as a thousand pounds by dropping in there." Robert reeled.

Soon he went every day to the strange land where men talked a language that he did not know. It had been decided that he should watch the iron in the neighbourhood, so that Mr. Hutton might extend a guiding hand without discomfort, and an office was rented in Eastcheap. Eastcheap is a sour-smelling thoroughfare into which dirty loafers emerge from the courts of Billingsgate in order that they may have more room to spit. Distressing as Robert found it to sit in the office, he found it more distressing to go out.

Of course not many people see the City. Myriads saw it once, but that was when they came there in their youth. Few are to be discovered in the City who remember how it looks. Occasionally a clerk in his first berth may be found who sees the City, but he is not promised to the casual searcher, for City clerks as a body are observant in the streets of one thing

only. They observe neckties. This passion, to which the hosiers of the district pander inordinately, was displayed to the poet between the hours of one and two, wet or fine. From desk to food, from food to desk, streamed the black multitude, expressionless, torpid and unseeing, until neckties flaunted in a window; then the vacant faces brightened, and there was a block. The rule of the pavement is known everywhere excepting in the City, where it is most needed; but at the hosiers' windows pedestrianism became more than an effort—it became a feat.

Robert's eyes had no custom in them; Robert did see the City, and he was unhappier than he had poetry to tell; for that matter, he did not try to tell it. He wrote nothing now but figures, and commercially ungrammatical epistles which took him a long time to compose. For twenty years he had believed his rushlight was a star—he had done with illusion at last. Illusion was in its grave, and the Failure laid his hope of laurels on the top. Yet he thought tenderly of Illusion. The funeral was over, but he mourned. He had embraced a new career, but he did not love it. Although he repeated that the past was dead, he could not prevent its ghost haunting Eastcheap. There were moments when it chilled the iron.

Often, as he forced his dreary way to luncheon, it walked beside him. He lunched sometimes with his preserver in the restaurants of the Employers. Generally he lunched with the ghost in the restaurants of the Employed. He noted that in the former the meat was tainted less frequently. On the other hand,

the Employed were served by clean, quiet girls instead of by sleezy, vociferous waiters.

One afternoon he lunched at an establishment that he had not tried before. The ghost had been insistent all the morning. He found a vacant seat, hung up his hat, and examined the bill of fare. He was in one of the more modest restaurants of Messrs. Lyons, and around him young men and women with blank faces chumped beef-steak pudding, and read sixpenny editions of the novels that are written for them. The girl beside him ordered apple-tart. Her voice was pleasant, and momentarily he regretted that in reading she leant her cheek upon her palm, for she hid her profile. It should have been a pretty profile, to match her voice. Moved by an impulse of curiosity, he glanced at the page she pondered, and then he dropped the menu: she was reading his own verse!

"Good God!" he exclaimed.

"I *beg* your pardon?" said the girl, surveying him with dignity.

"I apologise," stammered the poet; "I was startled."

Evidently she found his excuse inadequate, and he was thankful that at this moment they were left with the table to themselves. "I meant that I was startled to see the book you were reading," he explained.

"I see nothing startling in it," said the lady, still frigid.

He felt that she might have expressed herself more happily, but he was in no position to rebuke her.

"Of course in one sense it isn't startling at all," he concurred; "in fact, it's very feeble."

"I am afraid I can't agree with you," rejoined his reader; and the haughtiness of her contradiction warmed his heart.

"You can't mean you really like it?"

"I like it very much." She had grey eyes that challenged him scornfully; he sunned himself in her disdain.

"Did you buy it?" he asked, a tremor in his tone.

"Really—!" she began. But his air was so respectful that she added the next instant, "Yes, for twopence, second-hand."

"Ah!" said the poet. "Still it's a most extraordinary occurrence."

She looked away from him with a frown; her attention was divided between his verse and the apple-tart. Robert sat a prey to temptation. To melt her by avowing himself would be ridiculous, but agreeable. Succumbing, he murmured:

"To tell you the truth, I am glad you like the book."

"Eh?" she said. "Why?"

"Because I wrote it."

It should have been a dramatic moment, but the girl bungled her part and disbelieved him.

Fully five minutes were devoted to convincing her. However, the five minutes brought such a flutter of pink to her cheeks, so tender a glow into her eyes, that the time was by no means wasted.

"I couldn't expect to meet a poet in the City," she pleaded.

"And certainly I couldn't expect to meet my Gentle

Reader here," said Robert. He examined the slim volume ruefully.

"In such good condition, and only twopence!" he complained.

"If it had been more I mightn't have bought it," she said.

He found himself resigned that the book had been marked down to twopence.

She told him that she wrote shorthand in an office in Cornhill. Eastcheap lay in the same direction, and after she had gone he felt that it would have been pleasurable to walk some of the way beside her.

He was sorry, too, that he had omitted to inquire if she irradiated the restaurant daily.

On the morrow he betook himself to Lyons' with hope. He descried the lady at a distant table, and it had the charm of vacant chairs. There was no reason why he should ignore them.

"You are often in the City, then?" she asked as he sat down.

"I come every day," said Robert, and seeing she was mystified, he added, "I am in an office here, like you."

But plainly this mystified her more still. "Do you mean you are in business?"

"Truly," he told her. "I think I shall have roast beef."

"I should try the mutton," she said. "But you are a poet?"

"I used to fancy myself one."

It was very absurd, but before they paid their bills he was informing her that he had divorced his Muse,

and was in a foreign land alone. This time they left the restaurant together.

"That, O foreigner," said the lady of Lyons', "is the Royal Exchange!"

"I know," said Robert. "But what do they exchange in it?"

"I have no idea," she confessed. "If you like, we will ask a policeman."

"A curious thing about policemen," remarked the poet, "is that if you want a civil answer, you must avoid putting your question civilly. They are, conspicuously, a class who respect rudeness. How long have you been coming to the City, to learn so much about it?"

"I have been coming to the City for nine years," she said, "and I have learnt a great deal. I know now where the Tower is, and which of the benches under the trees makes you feel most Harrison Ainsworthy. And I know the shop in Cornhill that sells the best twopenny tarts. They are small, but peerless."

"If you hadn't bought my verses you might have had another," sighed Robert. "Some day, when I have made my fortune, I shall give you one."

"Thank you," she said. "I suppose you know what you are looking at across the road?"

"I am looking at a book shop," replied the poet.

"You were meant to see the Mansion House," demurred his guide, "where the Lord Mayor lives."

"I do not like Lord Mayors," said Robert, "they never ask me to their literary dinners."

"They are punished for it," said the girl. "Once

a year at midnight they drop their little glass slippers, and their beautiful coach turns back into a pumpkin."

"It serves them right," said the poet vengefully.

But they were not always so foolish as this. To meet at luncheon became their custom, and sometimes their confidences were quite practical. By dint of lunching hurriedly on occasion, they made time to reach the Tower together, and he approved her taste in benches. It was on the bench one day when the sun shone that she told him her history. Her history was so commonplace that she apologised for relating it, and her surprise was vast that he fell to reverie.

"Why," he cried, "we have found a Moral! It is you who are to be pitied, not I. What have I to mourn in the City? I have buried nothing here but the gift of making little verses. But you, you have buried the divinest gift of the gods, your beautiful youth! You have never had any pleasure in your life, yet you are content. I am ashamed."

Not long afterwards his preserver exclaimed:

"Bobbie, I think you're getting acclimatised. You're putting your back into it—if you don't take care you'll make money!"

"I aim at making money," said the poet with commercial staidness; and added irresponsibly, "I want to buy twopenny tarts."

It was just like him, to bid farewell to verse-making, and then to find his best poetry in the City. There are dreamers who would turn every opportunity to disadvantage.

But the iron is shaping so well that when it becomes

a limited liability company with another manager, Robert's slice should be substantial.

We may imagine him going back to the daffodils.

It is not impossible that there will be orange blossoms.

And in the meantime there is certainly the luncheon hour.

XVI

"PARDON, YOU ARE MADEMOISELLE GIRARD!"

A NEWSVENDOR passed along the terrace of the Café d'Harcourt bawling "*La Voix Parisienne.*" The Frenchman at my table made a gesture of aversion. Our eyes met; I said:

"You do not like *La Voix?*"

He answered with intensity:

"I loathe it."

"What's its offence?"

The wastrel frowned; he fiddled with his frayed and filthy collar.

"You revive painful associations; you ask me for a humiliating story," he murmured—and regarded his empty glass.

I can take a hint as well as most people.

He prepared his poison reflectively.

"I will tell you all!" he said.

One autumn the editor of *La Voix* announced to the assistant-editor: "I have a great idea for booming the paper!"

The assistant-editor gazed at him respectfully.

"I propose to prove, in the public interest, the difficulty of tracing a missing person. I shall instruct a member of the staff to disappear. I shall publish his description and his portrait. And I shall offer a prize to the first stranger who identifies him."

The assistant-editor had tact, and he did not reply that the idea had already been worked in London with a disappearing lady. He replied:

"What an original scheme!"

"It might be even more effective that the disappearing person should be a lady," added the chief, like one inspired.

"That," cried the assistant-editor, "is the top brick of genius!"

So the editor reviewed the brief list of his lady contributors, and sent for Mademoiselle Girard.

His choice fell upon Mademoiselle Girard for two reasons. First, she was not facially remarkable — a smudgy woodcut of her would look much like a smudgy woodcut of anybody else. Second, she was not widely known in Paris, being at the beginning of her career; in fact, she was so inexperienced that hitherto she had been entrusted only with criticism.

However, the young woman had all her buttons on; and after he had talked to her, she said cheerfully:

"Without a chaperon I should be conspicuous, and without a fat purse I should be handicapped. So it is understood that I am to provide myself with a suitable companion, and to draw upon the office for expenses?"

"Mademoiselle," returned the editor, "the purpose of the paper is to portray a drama of life, not to emulate an

opéra bouffe. I shall explain more fully. Please figure to yourself that you are a young girl in an unhappy home. Let us suppose that a stepmother is at fault. You feel that you can submit to her oppression no longer; you resolve to be free, or to end your troubles in the Seine. Weeping, you pack your modest handbag; you cast a last lingering look at the oil painting of your own dear mother, who is with the angels in the drawing-room; that is to say, of your own dear mother in the drawing-room, who is with the angels. (It still hangs there; your father has insisted on it.) Unheard, you steal from the house; the mysterious city of Paris stretches before your friendless feet. Can you engage a chaperon? Can you draw upon an office for expenses? The idea is laughable. You have saved, at a liberal computation, fifty francs; it is necessary for you to find employment without delay. But what happens? Your father is distracted by your loss; the thought of the perils that beset you frenzies him; he invokes the aid of the police. Well, the object of our experiment is to demonstrate that, in spite of an advertised reward, in spite of a published portrait, in spite of the public's zeal itself, you will be passed on the Boulevards and in the slums by myriads of unsuspecting eyes for weeks."

The girl inquired, much less blithely:

"How long is this experiment to continue?"

"It will continue until you are identified, of course. The longer the period, the more triumphant our demonstration."

"And I am to have no more than fifty francs to exist on all the time? Monsieur, the job does not call to me."

"You are young and you fail to grasp the value of your opportunity," said the editor, with paternal tolerance. "From such an assignment you will derive experiences that will be of the highest benefit to your future. Rejoice, my child! Very soon I shall give you final instructions."

The Frenchman lifted his glass, which was again empty.

"I trust my voice does not begin to grate upon you?" he asked solicitously. "Much talking affects my uvula."

I made a trite inquiry.

He answered that, since I was so pressing, he would!

"Listen!" he resumed, after a sip.

I am not in a position to say whether the young lady humoured the editor by rejoicing, but she obeyed him by going forth. Her portrait was duly published, *La Voix* professed ignorance of her whereabouts from the moment that she left the Rue Louis-le-Grand, and a prize of two thousand francs was to reward the first stranger who said to her, "Pardon, you are Mademoiselle Girard!" In every issue the Public were urged towards more strenuous efforts to discover her, and all Paris bought the paper, with amusement, to learn if she was found yet.

At the beginning of the week, misgivings were ingeniously hinted as to her fate. On the tenth day the editor printed a letter (which he had written himself), hotly condemning him for exposing a poor girl to danger. It was signed "An Indignant Parent," and

teemed with the most stimulating suggestions. Copies of *La Voix* were as popular as peanuts at a fair. When a fortnight had passed, the prize was increased to three thousand francs, and many young men resigned less promising occupations, such as authorship and the fine arts, in order to devote themselves exclusively to the search.

Personally, I had something else to do. I am an author (as you may have divined by the rhythm of my impromptu phrases), but it happened at that time that a play of mine had been accepted by the Grand-Guignol, subject to an additional thrill being introduced, and I preferred pondering for a thrill in my garret to hunting for a pin in a haystack.

Enfin, I completed the drama to the Management's satisfaction, and received a comely little cheque in payment. It was the first cheque that I had seen for years! I embraced myself; I paid to be shaved; I committed no end of follies.

How good is life when one is rich—immediately one joins the optimists! I feared the future no longer; I was hungry, and I let my appetite do as it liked with me. I lodged in Montmartre, and it was my custom to eat at the unpretentious Faisan d'Or, when I ate at all; but that morning my mood demanded something resplendent. Rumours had reached me of a certain Café Éclatant, where for one-franc-fifty one might breakfast on five epicurean courses amid palms and plush. I said I would go the pace. I adventured the Café Éclatant.

The interior realised my most sanguine expectations. The room would have done no discredit to the Grands

Boulevards. I was so much exhilarated, that I ordered a half bottle of barsac, though I noted that here it cost ten sous more than at the Faisan, and I prepared to enjoy the unwonted extravagance of my repast to the concluding crumb.

Monsieur, there are events in life of which it is difficult to speak without bitterness. When I recall the disappointment of that déjeûner at the Café Éclatant, my heart swells with rage. The soup was slush, the fish tasted like washing, the meat was rags. "Dessert" consisted of wizened grapes; the one thing fit to eat was the cheese.

As I meditated on the sum that I had squandered, I could have cried with mortification, and, to make matters more pathetic still, I was as hungry as ever. I sat seeking some caustic epigram to wither the dame-de-comptoir, and presently the door opened and another victim entered. Her face was pale and interesting. I saw, by her hesitation, that the place was strange to her. An accomplice of the chief brigand pounced on her immediately, and bore her to a table opposite. The misguided girl was about to waste one-franc-fifty. I felt that I owed a duty to her in this crisis. The moment called for instant action; before she could decide between slush and hors d'œuvres, I pulled an envelope from my pocket, scribbled a warning, and expressed it to her by the robber who had brought my bill.

I had written, "The déjeûner is dreadful. Escape!"

It reached her in the nick of time. She read the wrong side of the envelope first, and was evidently puzzled. Then she turned it over. A look of surprise,

a look of thankfulness, rendered her still more fascinating. I perceived that she was inventing an excuse—that she pretended to have forgotten something. She rose hastily and went out. My barsac was finished—shocking bad tipple it was for the money—and now I, too, got up and left. When I issued into the street, I found her waiting for me.

"I think you are the knight to whom my gratitude is due, monsieur?" she murmured graciously.

"Mademoiselle," I responded, "you magnify the importance of my service."

"It was a gallant deed," she insisted. "You have saved me from a great misfortune—perhaps greater than you understand. My finances are at their lowest ebb, and to have beggared myself for an impossible meal would have been no joke. Thanks to you, I may still breakfast satisfactorily somewhere else. Is it treating you like Baedeker's Guide to the Continent if I ask you to recommend a restaurant?"

"Upon my word, I doubt if you can do better than the Faisan d'Or," I said. "A moment ago I was lacerated with regret that I had not gone there. But there is a silver lining to every hash-house, and my choice of the Éclatant has procured me the glory of your greeting."

She averted her gaze with a faint smile. She had certainly charm. Admiration and hunger prompted me to further recklessness. I said: "This five-course swindle has left me ravenous, and I am bound for the Faisan myself. May I beg for the rapture of your company there?"

"Monsieur, you overwhelm me with chivalries," she

replied; "I shall be enchanted." And, five minutes later, the Incognita and I were polishing off smoked herring and potato salad, like people who had no time to lose.

"Do you generally come here?" she asked, when we had leisure.

"Infrequently—no oftener than I have a franc in my pocket. But details of my fasts would form a poor recital, and I make a capital listener."

"You also make a capital luncheon," she remarked.

"Do not prevaricate," I said severely. "I am consumed with impatience to hear the history of your life. Be merciful and communicative."

"Well, I am young, fair, accomplished, and of an amiable disposition," she began, leaning her elbows on the table.

"These things are obvious. Come to confidences! What is your profession?"

"By profession I am a clairvoyante and palmist," she announced.

I gave her my hand at once, and I was in two minds about giving her my heart, "Proceed," I told her; "reveal my destiny!"

Her air was profoundly mystical.

"In the days of your youth," she proclaimed, "your line of authorship is crossed by many rejections."

"Oho, I am an author, am I? That's a fine thing in guesses!"

"It is written!" she affirmed, still scrutinising my palm. "Your dramatic lines are—er—countless; some of them are good. I see danger; you should beware of—I cannot distinguish!" she clasped her brow and

shivered. "Ah, I have it! You should beware of hackneyed situations."

"So the Drama is 'written,' too, is it?"

"It is written, and I discern that it is already accepted," she said. "For at the juncture where the Café Éclatant is eclipsed by the Restaurant du Faisan d'Or, there is a distinct manifestation of cash."

"Marvellous!" I exclaimed. "And can the sibyl explain why she surmised that I was a dramatic author?"

"Even so!" she boasted. "You wrote your message to me on an envelope from the Dramatic Authors' Society. What do you think of my palmistry?"

"I think so little of it, that I am quite sure it is not your career. You are more likely an author, yourself, or an actress, or a journalist. Perhaps you are Mademoiselle Girard. Mon Dieu! What a piece of luck for me if I found Mademoiselle Girard!"

"And what a piece of luck for her!"

"Why for her?"

"Well, she cannot be having a rollicking time. It would not break her heart to be found, one may be certain."

"In that case," I said, "she has only to give someone the tip."

"Oh, that would be dishonourable—she has a duty to fulfil to *La Voix*, she must wait till she is identified. And, remember, there must be no half measures—the young man must have the intuition to say firmly, 'Pardon, you are Mademoiselle Girard!'"

Her earnest gaze met mine for an instant.

"As a matter of fact," I said, "I do not see how any-

one can be expected to identify her in the street. The portrait shows her without a hat, and a hat makes a tremendous difference."

She sighed.

"What is your trouble?" I asked.

"Man!"

"Man? Tell me his address, that I may slay him."

"The whole sex! Its impenetrable stupidity. If Mademoiselle Girard is ever recognised it will be by a woman. Man has no instinct."

"May one inquire the cause of these flattering reflections?"

Her laughter pealed.

"Let us talk of something else!" she commanded. "When does your play come out, Monsieur Thibaud Hippolyte Duboc? You see I learnt your name, too?"

"You have all the advantages," I complained. "Will you take a second cup of coffee, Mademoiselle—er——?"

"No thank you, monsieur," she said.

"Will you take a liqueur, Mademoiselle—er——?"

"Mademoiselle Er will not take a liqueur either," she pouted.

"Well, will you take a walk?"

We sauntered to the Buttes-Chaumont, and very agreeable I found it there. We chose a seat in the shade, and I began to feel that I had known her all my life. More precisely, perhaps, I began to feel that I wished to know her all my life. A little breeze was whispering through the boughs, and she lifted her face to it gratefully.

"How delicious," she said. "I should like to take off my hat!"

"Do then!"

"Shall I?"

"Why not?"

She pulled the pins out slowly, and laid the hat aside, and raised her eyes to me, smiling.

"Well?" she murmured.

"You are beautiful!"

"Is that all?"

"What more would you have me say?"

The glare of sunshine mellowed while we talked; clocks struck unheeded by me. It amazed me at last, to discover how long she had held me captive. Still, I knew nothing of her affairs, excepting that she was hard up—that, by comparison, I was temporarily prosperous. I did not even know where she meant to go when we moved, nor did it appear necessary to inquire yet, for the sentiment in her tones assured me that she would dismiss me with no heartless haste.

Two men came strolling past the bench, and one of them stared at her so impudently that I burned with indignation. After looking duels at him, I turned to her, to deprecate his rudeness. Judge of my dismay when I perceived that she was shuddering with emotion! Jealousy blackened the gardens to me.

"Who is that man?" I exclaimed.

"I don't know," she faltered.

"You don't know? But you are trembling?"

"Am I?"

"I ask you who he is? How he dared to look at you like that?"

" Am I responsible for the way a loafer looks ? "

" You are responsible for your agitation ; I ask you to explain it ! "

" And by what right, after all ? "

" By what right ? Wretched, false-hearted girl ! Has our communion for hours given me no rights ? Am I a Frenchman, or a flounder ? Answer ; you are condemning me to tortures ! Why did you tremble under that man's eyes ? "

" I was afraid," she stammered.

" Afraid ? "

" Afraid that he had recognised me."

" Mon Dieu ! Of what are you guilty ? "

" I am not guilty."

" Of what are you accused ? "

" I can tell you nothing," she gasped.

" You shall tell me all ! " I swore. " In the name of my love I demand it of you. Speak ! Why did you fear his recognition ? "

Her head drooped pitifully ;

" Because I wanted *you* to recognise me first ! "

For a tense moment I gazed at her bewildered. In the next, I cursed myself for a fool—I blushed for my suspicions, my obtuseness—I sought dizzily the words, the prescribed words that I must speak.

" Pardon," I shouted, " you are Mademoiselle Girard ! "

She sobbed.

" What have I done ? "

" You have done a great and generous thing ! I am humbled before you ! I bless you ! I don't know how I could have been such a dolt as not to guess ! "

"Oh, how I wish you had guessed! You have been so kind to me, I longed for you to guess! And now I have betrayed a trust. I have been a bad journalist."

"You have been a good friend. Courage! No one will ever hear what has happened. And, anyhow, it is all the same to the paper whether the prize is paid to me or to somebody else."

"Yes," she admitted. "That is true. Oh, when that man turned round and looked at me, I thought your chance had gone! I made sure it was all over! Well"—she forced a smile—"it is no use my being sorry, is it? Mademoiselle Girard is 'found'!"

"But you must not be sorry," I said. "Come, a disagreeable job is finished! And you have the additional satisfaction of knowing the money goes to a fellow you don't altogether dislike. What do I have to do about it, hein?"

"You must telegraph to *La Voix* at once that you have identified me. Then, in the morning you should go to the office. I can depend upon you, can't I? You will never give me away to a living soul?"

"Word of honour!" I vowed. "What do you take me for? Do tell me you don't regret! There's a dear! Tell me you don't regret!"

She threw back her head dauntlessly.

"No," she said, "I don't regret. Only, in justice to me, remember that I was treacherous in order to do a turn to you, not to escape my own discomforts. To be candid, I believe I wish that we had met in two or three weeks' time, instead of to-day!"

"Why that?"

"In two or three weeks' time the prize was to be raised to five thousand francs, to keep up the excitement."

"Ciel!" I cried. "Five thousand francs! Do you know that positively?"

"Oh, yes!" She nodded. "It is arranged."

Five thousand francs would have been a fortune to me.

Neither of us spoke for some seconds. Then, continuing my thoughts aloud, I said:

"After all, why should I telegraph at once? What is to prevent my waiting the two or three weeks?"

"Oh, to allow you to do that would be scandalous of me," she demurred; "I should be actually swindling *La Voix*."

"*La Voix* will obtain a magnificent advertisement for its outlay, which is all that it desires," I argued; "the boom will be worth five thousand francs to *La Voix*, there is no question of swindling. Five thousand francs is a sum with which one might——"

"It can't be done," she persisted.

"To a man in my position," I said, "five thousand francs——"

"It is impossible for another reason! As I told you, I am at the end of my resources. I rose this morning, praying that I should be identified. My landlady has turned me out, and I have no more than the price of one meal to go on with."

"You goose!" I laughed. "And if I were going to net five thousand francs by your tip three weeks hence, don't you suppose it would be good enough for me to pay your expenses in the meanwhile?"

She was silent again. I understood that her conscience was a more formidable drawback than her penury.

Monsieur, I said that you had asked me for a humiliating story—that I had poignant memories connected with *La Voix*. Here is one of them:

I set myself to override her scruples—to render this girl false to her employers!

Many men might have done so without remorse. But not a man like me. I am naturally high-minded, of the most sensitive honour. Even when I conquered at last, I could not triumph. Far from it! I blamed the force of circumstances furiously for compelling me to sacrifice my principles to my purse. Hein? I am no adventurer."

Enfin, the problem now was, where was I to hide her? Her portmanteau she had deposited at a railway station. Should we have it removed to another bedroom, or to a pension de famille? Both plans were open to objections—a bedroom would necessitate her still challenging discovery in restaurants; and at a pension, she would run risks on the premises. A pretty kettle of fish if someone spotted her while I was holding for the rise!

We debated the point exhaustively. And, having yielded, she displayed keen intelligence in arranging for the best. Finally she declared:

"Of the two things, a pension is to be preferred. Instal me there as your sister! Remember that people picture me a wanderer and alone; therefore, a lady who is introduced by her brother is in small danger of being recognised as Mademoiselle Girard."

She was right, I perceived it. We found an excellent pension, where I was unknown. I presented her as "Mademoiselle Henriette Delafosse, my sister." And, to be on the safe side, I engaged a private sitting-room for her, explaining that she was somewhat neurasthenic.

Good! I waited breathless now for every edition of *La Voix*, thinking that her price might advance even sooner. But she closed at three thousand francs daily. Girard stood firm, but there was no upward tendency. Every afternoon I called on her. She talked about that conscience of hers again sometimes, and it did not prove quite so delightful as I had expected when I paid a visit. Especially when I paid a bill as well.

Monsieur, my disposition is most liberal. But when I had been mulcted in the second bill, I confess that I became a trifle downcast. I had prepared myself to nourish the girl wholesomely, as befitted the circumstances, but I had said nothing of vin supérieur, and I noted that she had been asking for it as if it were cider in Normandy. The list of extras in those bills gave me the jumps, and the charges made for scented soap were nothing short of an outrage.

Well, there was but one more week to bear now, and during the week I allowed her to revel. This, though I was approaching embarrassments *re* the rent of my own attic!

How strange is life! Who shall foretell the future? I had wrestled with my self-respect, I had nursed an investment which promised stupendous profits were I capable of carrying my scheme to a callous conclusion.

But could I do it? Did I claim the prize, which had already cost me so much? Monsieur, you are a man of the world, a judge of character: I ask you, did I claim the prize, or did I not?"

He threw himself back in the chair, and toyed significantly with his empty glass.

I regarded him, his irresolute mouth, his receding chin, his unquenchable thirst for absinthe. I regarded him and I paid him no compliments. I said:

"You claimed the prize."

"You have made a bloomer," he answered. "I did not claim it. The prize was claimed by the wife of a piano-tuner, who had discovered Mademoiselle Girard employed in the artificial flower department of the Printemps. I read the blood-curdling news at nine o'clock on a Friday evening; and at 9.15, when I hurled myself, panic-stricken, into the pension, the impostor who had tricked me out of three weeks' board and lodging had already done a bolt. I have never had the joy of meeting her since.

XVII

THE CALL FROM THE PAST

Once there was a prosperous solicitor, and he had two sons. The elder he took into his office; the younger he sent to the Bar. The younger boy's name was Robert, and he was generally called "Bob." The elder boy's name was Edward, and no one ever called him "Ted."

Edward went to the office with satisfaction. He was a shrewd youth who made useful friends, and didn't allow pleasure to stand in the way of profit. Before he had been in the business two years he bullied the head clerk, and it was predicted that he would "go further than his father." Bob entered his profession negligently. He was a genial fellow who liked bohemian clubs, and wrote farces that were never produced. Before he had been at the Bar two years he succumbed to an unconquerable passion and went on the stage.

The stage had not then become the smartest vocation in England. Viscounts occasionally married dancing-girls, but socially that was as high as the theatre had climbed. It may be difficult for English people to credit it to-day, but though old Mr. Blackstone was

simply a solicitor, he felt humiliated when his son "took to play-acting." What will be understood more easily is that he was wrathful in thinking of the money he had wasted to make a barrister of a crank. He told the crank that he washed his hands of him, and as a matter of fact talked rather like the irate parents in the comedies in which Bob was going to perform.

Nevertheless his growl was worse than his bite—in which he resembled the comedy parents again. Ascertaining that Bob's salary was to be fifteen shillings a week, and that the histrionic career was precarious, he undertook to provide him with the sum of forty pounds a year, payable quarterly, for the term of three years. "At the end of which time," he said, "I think you ought to be able to support yourself, if you have really any aptitude as a buffoon."

Bob was of the same opinion. Don't laugh at him, he was young. He slammed the door of his chambers rejoicing, and—because his father wished him to change his name—he dropped the "Blackstone" and called himself "Lawless." The old man remarked that "Senseless" would be better still, but Bob thought not.

Now if this had been a nice, proper story, with a Moral presented gratis to every purchaser, Bob would have had only two courses open to him. He would either have succeeded brilliantly and moved his father to tears of pride, or he would have found the discomforts unbearable, and returned repentant. In reality he didn't succeed at all, and he had never been so happy in his life.

His sole regret was that the tour was short, for when it finished he was out of an engagement. He remained

out of an engagement much longer than he had been in one, and subsisted on the parental allowance. The change from the flesh-pots of Regent's Park was severe, and if anything could have cooled his stage fever, it would have been cooled now, but it defied even semi-starvation. By and by he obtained another small part, and his temperature was higher still. Naturally he assured himself that by the time the allowance was withdrawn he would be independent of it. And that was where he erred.

At the end of the three years he was pacing the Strand. His luck had been hard, and old Mr. Blackstone was hard too. He stuck to his guns; Bob must shift by his own abilities henceforward, or Bob must go back to the Bar. Bob was footsore, hungry, and penniless; Bob went back to the Bar.

Of course there was still his pen. His hopes as an actor had been shivered, but to his ambition as a dramatist he clung. It was the spar in the shipwreck. The night was black, but afar the footlights beamed. Buffeted as he was, he might regain them by his pen.

So he wrote more farces—farces, and burlesques, and one or two melodramas as well. His father did not know that. Robert Blackstone, the budding barrister, preserved appearances; and Robert Lawless, the panting playwright, preserved his manuscripts—for they all came back. All, that is to say, with the exception of a farcical comedy which he had actually sold for twenty-five pounds, but which had never been staged. Some of his work was good, but in England the chief qualifications for artistic success are commercial ability,

and the money to exploit it; Bob lacked both. By degrees he became weary of trying to reach the lime-lit shore, his struggles grew fainter; by degrees "Robert Lawless" took some interest in Robert Blackstone. He thought of the Bar more, and of the Theatre less. One day when his father told him he had "handled the brief uncommonly well," he was elated. He was nine-and-twenty now.

Robert Blackstone had begun to cut "Robert Lawless" out—was travelling faster, proving the better of the pair. And "Lawless," who felt rather sore about it at first, presently forgave him. Bob began to look less like a Bob and more like a Robert. People noticed "what a strong resemblance there was between him and his brother." As an earnest young barrister he no longer frequented bohemian clubs. It was understood that one mustn't go round to Plowden Buildings any more and waste his time. Nobody said to him now, "Come and have a drink, old chap!" Occasionally some one might say, "Will you—er—take a glass of sherry, Mr. Blackstone?"

As the years passed, even that was seldom said. He had shaken off the dust of Plowden Buildings, and had chambers in Garden Court. His humour was becoming heavy. The mothers of marriageable daughters found it convulsing. He was spoken of as a man with a future, and dined at dreary houses. Old Blackstone died, and as Robert was making a handsome income he was mentioned in the will with abundant generosity. Wherefore he was rich. So was Edward the solicitor, who had a wife and three children now. Edward was proud of his brother; he

wanted him to take silk, and to stand for Beckenhampton later. Robert was thinking of these things himself. His age was forty-one. And here ends the prologue.

So we see that this improper story may be said to begin at a point long after all orthodox stories have concluded—it really begins twelve years after the prodigal reformed. Reformation, we know, is always final—in stories. When the prodigal has once returned to the odour of sanctity we are quite sure that he will never desire change of air; we understand that he will always be just as good and peaceful as we leave him on the last page. Human nature is made like that—in stories.

One May afternoon, as Robert came out of Court, a man murmured to another, "He's a dry stick is Blackstone!" Robert overheard, and smiled his dry smile. Yes, he supposed that was his social reputation at the Bar. As he joined Edward, and listened to his pleased comments on the jury's finding, he even admitted to himself that the reputation might be deserved. Odd! How very different from a "dry stick" he had been once.

Edward was animated—for Edward. He kept nodding his grey head, and pinched his nose repeatedly between his forefinger and thumb, a habit that he had in conversation. They stood talking in the street for about ten minutes. It occurred to Robert with a touch of faint surprise that he had long ceased to shirk his brother's company. Yet there was no doubt that Edward was quite as dull a dog as he had ever been. As they talked there, outside the Law Courts, Robert

compassionated himself a little for not being bored by Edward.

He had been cheerful as he unrobed, but the remark he had caught lurked in his ears, and when he entered his chambers he found himself repeating it. "For the defendant," a pleasant phrase to-day, was momentarily forgotten; "A dry stick" sounded in his mind instead. He, "Bob," had actually become a "dry stick"!

And he was only forty-one. He lit a cigarette, and mused. Beyond the open window the flowers of the garden were bright in sunshine, and the fountain tinkled dreamily. There was a nursemaid with a child among the flowers; he wondered, for a moment, whether he would have done well to marry.

Marvellous, in looking back, how suddenly success had come!—marvellous to remember how hard he had had to flog his brain at the beginning to earn a legal guinea; if one managed to turn the second corner at the Bar at all, one sped on with a rush. But how unlikely it had looked that he would ever turn that corner!

How unlikely it had looked in the days when he belonged to the Amity Club, and fellows used to quote the jokes he flashed over a tankard and a steak at three in the morning! If his boyish hopes had been justified, if he had had talent as an actor, perhaps life would have tasted better to him, after all? "Robert Blackstone, K.C." He would soon be that. "Robert Blackstone, K.C., M.P."? He might expect it. "Sir Robert Blackstone, Solicitor-General"? It was on the cards. Why wouldn't his heart swell at the prospect, why didn't he catch his breath, what the deuce had become of all his emotions?

Oh! he was getting sentimental, listening to the fountain. Shut the window, ring the bell, see what briefs had come in!

"And a letter, sir!"

"All right," said Robert, "put it down."

The eagerness with which he used once to seize his briefs! The swift glance to learn the fee, the impatience to gather the contents! Other incomes, other manners —he pulled the tape off leisurely to-day. "A dry stick!" he reiterated. Oh, one had to pay for success, there was no doubt!

His gaze wandered to the letter, and rested on it, startled; a little quiver ran through him. For several seconds a sensation that was half pleasure, half pain, held him quite still. The letter had been redirected at Plowden Buildings. It was addressed to "Robert Lawless, Esq.," —c/o himself!

"T.R., HETTON-LE-HOLE, DURHAM, *May 1st.*

"DEAR SIR,—I have come across the 'script of your farcical comedy entitled *No Flies on Flossie*, all rights of which I acquired some years ago. It is a bit antique in parts now, and I think you might like to bring it up to date. I am putting it on at O.H. Ashton-under-Lyne to see how it shapes. We rehearse at P.O.W. Manchester. The first Call is for twelve o'clock, Monday, 18th inst.—Yours faithfully,

"CAVENDISH PINK."

When the colour had crept back to his face, Robert laughed — the perfunctory laugh that he gave to a Judge's joke. He shrugged his shoulders. He put

the letter down, and laughed again—he was acting to himself unconsciously. After a minute or two he picked it up and re-read it. How had Cavendish Pink come by the play? "Acquired" it? Not from the author. But the adventures of the manuscript were unimportant. Pink? Pink had been a rather popular comedian. On the see-saw of life Mr. Pink had gone down while Mr. Blackstone went up.

For the third time he read the letter. He knew that "T.R." stood for "Theatre Royal," but the other abbreviations had mystified him. It recurred to him with emotion that "O.H." meant "Opera House," and that "P.O.W." meant "Prince of Wales's." That he could have forgotten these things even for a moment! He drummed his fingers on the briefs, and saw his Youth.

Of course he could have nothing to do with the matter. "*No Flies on Flossie*—the work, we understand, of Mr. Robert Blackstone, the well-known barrister," etc. He shuddered in imagining such a paragraph. He said that it was lucky "Robert Lawless" was forgotten; certainly "Robert Lawless" would reveal nothing to any one who saw the piece in Ashton-under-Lyne, and doubtless its "run" would begin and end there. If he were silent, nobody would suspect his connection with it. But——well, if this had happened a few years earlier, he would have gone down to the place, just for a day, to see the performance. He said he would have felt curious about it—a few years ago!

Three or four hours had passed before he confessed to himself that he was curious now. He was in his

library after dinner; and though he had no intention of humouring his curiosity, he humoured his mind. It dwelt on scenes in the farce which had appeared to him brilliant when he wrote them. Would they appear brilliant to-day? He remembered the evening when he scribbled "Curtain," and Dick turned up and heard the last act read. "Jove! I didn't think you had it in you!" Dick had said; he was sitting on the window-sill—how it all came back!—how time flew! The score of hopes and disappointments the work had brought! With what passion he had despaired at that age! Could he despair so passionately at this? And then the excitement when the thing was taken—what a whirlwind of exultance! That night he got the news! He had dragged Dick out for oysters just before Scott's closed, and afterwards they sat up talking till daylight. The piece was to be produced a few weeks hence, and Dick had stipulated for *two* stalls on the first night, to take his girl. . . . Thirteen years ago! And Dick was dead.

On the morrow Robert decided that he might, after all, run down to Ashton-under-Lyne. He said he would not enter the stage-door, no one should surmise that the author was present; he would simply take a seat in the dress circle like anybody else. Why not? To associate himself with *No Flies on Flossie* was impossible, but to resist the desire to peep at it would be motiveless. No doubt when he was in the theatre he'd be hotly ashamed of having perpetrated such trash. Still—

He made no reply to Cavendish Pink. He was not prepared to revert to comic dialogue, even under a

pseudonym, nor did he see his way to correspond on the subject. Probably it would be inferred that the letter had miscarried, or that Mr. Lawless had died. Well, he *was* dead. Yet Robert Blackstone owned to himself that he regretted being unable to attend Bob Lawless's rehearsals. He did not own it all at once; he regretted it some time before he owned it. Then he said again that if this had happened a few years earlier, he might have—Eh? Just for a day or two? Yes, he would have given himself the fun then! It wouldn't have mattered so much a few years earlier.

How ardently, in the period when he was a small-part actor, he had looked forward to striding about a stage as the author and telling the company what to do! He had never rehearsed in a West End theatre, or he would have known that authors are rather small fry after the plays are written. It had been his dream. The author! And of course he would be privileged to smoke—he had imagined himself with a cigar between his lips, and his hands in the pockets of a fur overcoat. In his dream it was generally winter, because he wanted to wear a fur overcoat. Nice girls waylaid him in the wings, and said, "Do write in a line for me to speak, Mr. Lawless, *please!*" And he did. The courtly consideration that he had always shown—in his dream—to the humblest members of the cast! The glowing terms in which every one had spoken of him—in his dream! . . . It would have been agreeable to go to Manchester for the rehearsals.

About a week later he said that of course he wouldn't be so stupid, but that as a matter of fact he *could* go

if he chose; he could go as "Mr. Lawless"! It was in the highest degree unlikely that any one in a third-rate provincial company would know his face. He wouldn't do it, because he had long ago left such follies behind, but there was really nothing else to prevent him.

"The first call is for twelve o'clock, Monday, 18th instant"! Constantly the man thought of it, sometimes he fingered the letter again; daily, in the drawer of his desk, under the documents, under the briefs, it tempted him—the Call from the past.

Oh, out of the question!

He supposed it *would* be a folly?

After all, should he go?

If the Easter Term did not end on the 16th of May, there would have been no story; but it does.

He felt strange to himself when he took his ticket on Sunday. He felt excited, nervous, guilty. On the platform he avoided a man whom he knew. He realised the sensations of a fugitive from justice, and threw an apprehensive glance about the restaurant car. What should he say if he were asked where he was going? He was sorry the rehearsals were to be held in a big city like Manchester; what more likely than that an acquaintance would run against him in the street? As to the hotel, it would brim with danger: at any moment some one might exclaim, "How d'ye do?—what has brought *you* here?" But, to be sure, he merely meant to remain in an hotel for the night. On the morrow he would go into lodgings. They would be extremely uncomfortable, but at all events they would be private, and it was only for a week,

after all. A week would soon pass. He found himself wishing that it had passed already.

Rain was falling when he arrived in Manchester. He spent a melancholy evening in the "Smoke-room." Presently he saw a theatrical paper, and turning it over, observed advertisements of "professional apartments"; several of the houses advertised were in Manchester. The idea of installing himself in theatrical lodgings again carried a little tremor with it; but it was not disagreeable. These addresses to his hand, moreover, would spare him trouble.

Rain was falling when he shaved. No matter. It would be well to make his arrangements before he went to the rehearsal. He breakfasted briskly, opposite a commercial traveller who performed extraordinary feats with a knife and fork. At ten o'clock he had his bag put on to a cab. "All Saints" he said, for in Manchester all theatrical landladies and "All Saints" are neighbours.

The side streets of All Saints were not prepossessing. As he rang the bell, he first glanced about him wonderingly. Had he really been happy in places like this when he was young? He was relieved when the slatternly householder answered that she had only a "combined room." He interviewed several householders without success.

Gradually the manner in which he made his applications lost something of its legal stiffness; he laboured for a touch of the old-time freedom which he knew was demanded by the situation. He rang another bell, and a young woman in curling-pins came to the door.

"What rooms have you got this week?" said Robert, uneasily familiar.

"What do you want?" asked the woman.

"I want a sitting-room and bedroom," he said. And she was able to accommodate him.

Against the piano was a pile of comic songs; on the mantelpiece there were likenesses of performers in tights. The rooms were cosily furnished, and the rent was ten shillings a week inclusive of gas and fires; the Manchester weather was still chilly.

"I'll take them," said Robert.

When he had unpacked his bag, he smoked a cigar in the parlour, and smiled. "One always returns to one's first love," he mused; and really the first love looked attractive, though he viewed the signboard of a "mechanical chimney sweep" through the window.

Presently he asked his landlady for her card.

"I'll have to give you my professional card," she said, "but it has got the address on it; I'm in the Profession myself."

He read, "Mdlle. Superba: Terpsichorean Gymnast."

"That's me," she said, pointing, "that portrait there. I only let rooms as a 'obby—I don't let regular all the year round. Think it's good?"

"It doesn't flatter you," said Robert. But she was captivating in her gymnast's costume; he would never have supposed the photograph was meant for her. "I'm fortunate to find you 'letting' this week."

"Well, it's like this, it gives me something to do when I'm at home. That's what my husband says; he says 'It gives you something to do.' And I don't take ladies; they're a bit too much—'Can we 'ave some

'ot water, Ma?' all hours of the day; 'Can I come and 'eat my curling-tongs in the kitchen fire, Ma?' Ladies are a handful, and, as I say, I only 'let' as a 'obby. I'm going on tour again in August. Perhaps you've seen me in the Halls?"

"I've often applauded you in the Halls," he said, courteously untruthful; "I was puzzled how your face was so familiar to me." He was conscious that he hadn't recovered the tone yet, he knew that he was being much too formal. Could he pluck up the spirit to call a landlady "Ma" again himself?

There was an unaccustomed exhilaration in his veins as he drove to the Prince of Wales's; he did not define the feeling, but what he felt was "younger." When the cab jerked to a stoppage, his pulses beat like a lover's. He leapt out, and saw "Stage Entrance" painted on a dirty door. Again he pulled a stage-door open. "What name?" he was asked; "Mr. Lawless," he answered. And all at once he did not know if he was happy or ashamed; but he knew that he trembled.

The theatre looked dark for the first minute. He received a dim impression of ill-dressed people, drew a breathful of mouldy atmosphere that swept him back into the past. A vociferous man shook hands with him, and called him "my boy." "So you've turned up, my boy! That's all right. Afraid you hadn't had my note."

"How do you do, Mr. Pink," responded Robert.

They sat down in the stalls swathed in holland wrappers, and the mist before him melted. The ill-dressed people acquired features; he realised that

the rehearsal had begun, and that the figures on the stage were the butler and the maid-servant reading the opening scene of his farce.

"It wants freshening up, Lawless," said Mr. Pink; "it's a bit Noah's Arky here and there—old-fashioned. Still I think there's stuff in it. I'd like you to keep your ears open, see where you can stick in some lines. Make it modern, my boy, make it a bit topical; you know what I mean?"

"Oh—er—of course," said Robert with dismay. "Yes, certainly I must see what I can do."

He was painfully embarrassed; he had not felt so nervous since the day he heard himself pleading in Court for the first time. When the vociferous man left him, he thanked Heaven. Vaguely he thought of making his escape, of sending a telegram to say he was recalled to town.

"Mr. Lawless?"

A pale, shabby girl had come to him. She had very beautiful grey eyes; he was surprised that he had overlooked her.

"Yes?" he said.

"I'm to play 'Flossie'—I wanted to ask you a question about her. Is she simple in the first act, or only putting it on?"

He had no longer any views on the subject, but it would never do to say so.

"Simple," he said. "Oh, decidedly simple in the first act."

"That's what I thought!" she nodded, "and Mr. Pink wants me to do it the other way—Mr. Pink says she is only putting it on."

He perceived that he had encouraged her to defy the management.

"Of course," he added hastily, "when I say 'simple,' I mean relatively simple—everything is relative!"

"Oh, y-e-s," she said. But she was evidently at sea. After a moment she went on, "What I really want to know is how she is to speak those lines sitting on the hamper—is she sincere in that speech or isn't she?"

"That, of course, is the question," murmured Robert. "Yes, precisely! That speech is the—the——"

"It's the keynote to the part," she said.

He wished distressfully he could remember what speech she meant. Perhaps, after all, he had better be frank!

"To be quite honest with you," he said, "I wrote the piece a good many years ago; and since then I——"

"Oh, I see!" she laughed. "How funny! Since then you've written so many others that you've forgotten what it's about?"

"Exactly," said Robert; "that is to say, not at all. I haven't written any others, but I *have* forgotten what it's about?"

They regarded each other silently for a moment. . . . She seemed a singularly nice girl.

"I was quite a young man when I wrote it," he said abruptly.

"And you've done nothing since?"

"Well — er — not in the dramatic line. You're rehearsing my last attempt."

"Oh, I do hope it'll be a success!" she said earnestly; "then you'll go on working. It must be

rather—rather queer to see us rehearsing a piece you wrote so long ago?"

"It is," said Robert, "very queer." He paused again—he was again abrupt: "Once I knew every line of the three acts by heart!"

She lifted her eyes to him gravely, and didn't speak for a second. He liked her for not speaking—he saw that she understood.

"How it must take you back!" she whispered.

He sighed—and smiled. "So, you see, Mr. Pink probably knows more about your part to-day than the author does!—Er—you needn't tell all the Company what I've said."

"As if I should!" she exclaimed. "Oh! there's my cue, I must fly!"

"Miss Wilson!" shouted Pink. "Come on, Miss Wilson, please—take up your cues!"

"My fault," called Robert, "*I'm* to blame."

She looked back over her shoulder smiling at him as she ran, and somehow the rehearsal was more interesting to Robert. The nice girl read the lines he had invented thirteen years before—and listening to her, he remembered.

Rain was falling when the rehearsal finished. She hadn't an umbrella. "Which way do you go?" he asked as the stage-door slammed.

"All Saints," she replied; "Rumford Street."

"That's my way too. I want a cab—I can give you a lift."

"A cab?" She was openly astonished. "If you *must* squander money, you can take a penny car. But why not walk?"

"Is that what you do in the wet?"

"Well, if I took a cab every time it was wet in Manchester, my salary wouldn't go far, would it?"

"I have no idea what your salary is."

"Three pounds," she said frankly. "It isn't much for a leading lady, eh?"

"It isn't much for a leading lady, but it's a good deal for a young girl. In any other business three pounds a week wants a lot of earning."

"Oh, I know," she said. "I've got young brothers in the city. They call me 'the millionaire of the family!'"

"Do they like your being on tour alone?"

"Well, you see, it was necessary for me to earn my own living; things weren't very bright at home when I grew up. I don't spend all my salary on the delicacies of the season—I send half to my mother every week. I couldn't be any help to her if I were in a clerkship like the boys."

"But you're fond of the stage, aren't you? You sounded enthusiastic when you floored me with those questions."

She shrugged her shoulders. "At the beginning I was in love with it; I've been in the profession eight years now. You're giving me all your umbrella!"

"There's no expense attached to that," said Robert.

The cars were full, and she was evidently averse from a cab; so they travelled Oxford Street on foot, keeping close together.

"I suppose you'll go and see a show to-night?" she inquired.

"I hadn't thought of it," he said. "Shall you?"

"There's nothing else to do when one isn't playing. It's ghastly sitting in diggings all the evening, isn't it?"

"It must be dull if you're alone," he assented. It occurred to him that his own evening was going to be very dull indeed.

"Oh, I'm not alone, I'm staying with the girl who play's "Aunt Rachel," but it's dull anyhow. We thought of asking for seats at the St. James's."

"I—I think," said Robert, "that I'll go too. Perhaps I shall see you there. Or we might all go together, mightn't we?"

"Why, yes," she replied, "it would be very nice. Let's!"

"It would be delightful!" said Robert. "Yes, let's!"

They had reached her door, and she asked him if he would go in and have some tea. He said he would. They found the other girl at home, toasting crumpets. Miss Wilson toasted crumpets. Robert toasted crumpets also. They all knelt on the hearthrug and toasted crumpets together. His hostesses cried that they were "rising in their profession, having the author to tea!" He laughed. He cracked a joke. He wondered what Edward would say if he could see him.

At the St. James's the girls obtained two stalls for nothing, and Robert insisted on paying for one, though Miss Wilson reproved him for such waste of money. "We could quite easily have asked for three," she said. "It *is* silly of you! You make me angry."

Greatly daring, he proposed supper when the performance was over. The restaurants of Manchester are far to seek, but he didn't know that; he even told himself it mattered nothing if he were recognised; the

girls were ladies, a man had a right to take his friends to supper! However, they wouldn't go. That is to say, Miss Wilson wouldn't go; the other girl looked as if she wanted to. Miss Wilson said he must wait to see if his piece was a success. "If it makes a hit, well—perhaps!" He understood she took it for granted he was poor—she wouldn't let him be extravagant: the situation was not without a charm.

They chattered gaily as far as her apartments. "I can't ask you in after the show," she murmured.

"No, I know," he said, "I remember!" As he strolled on, he reflected that the day had been remarkably agreeable. He made for his lodging in high good humour. In Oxford Street he started, he received a shock, almost he staggered—he had perceived that he was whistling!

The terpsichorean gymnast gave him eggs boiled to perfection in the morning, and much better coffee than he got at home. As he tapped the second shell, it occurred to Robert that he had not opened a newspaper yesterday. Extraordinary! How often he had winced in recollecting that he never looked at a newspaper when he was a provincial actor! And actually he had been as bad again. He bought several newspapers after breakfast—and kept glancing at the clock.

It was rather jolly to sally forth to rehearsal, though rain was falling when it was time to go. He entered the theatre with zest to-day. Even he resented less stiffly the vociferous man's calling him "my boy." Miss Wilson's pale face smiled at him as at a friend. He conversed with one or two other members of the company, and saw his way to inserting a topical allusion

in the dialogue. Pink pronounced it "devilish good." Robert the Reviving was gratified that Pink thought his line "devilish good." When he was asked vociferously if he would "come across and have a drink," he didn't say "no." They drank prosperity to the piece in a vulgar bar. And he took back a box of sandwiches, and Peggy Wilson, and "Aunt Rachel," and he, shared them in the stalls.

Almost the next thing Robert realised vividly was that it was Friday. (Rain was falling.) It amazed him how the interval had flown. "Aunt Rachel" had gone over to Bury, where her fiancé was playing at the "Royal," and Miss Wilson, left alone, was coming in to tea. Robert had ordered cream with the tea, and Simnel cake. He stood at the window eager-eyed; the signboard of the "mechanical chimney-sweep" did not obtrude itself to him. He remembered how long it was since he last watched for a girl to come to tea.

But when she turned the corner he remembered only that he was to have a gracious afternoon. He wheeled the armchair to the hearth for her, and brought her a footstool. She was less talkative than usual. Somehow the first few minutes were disappointing.

"I have to go on Tuesday," he remarked presently; "and then it'll be all over."

"But you're coming to Ashton-under-Lyne for the production?"

"I don't know; I don't know that I shall be able to. I wish I hadn't to go back—I haven't enjoyed anything so much for years. By the way, I want you to do me a favour—I want you girls to come to supper with me on Monday night. I thought we might go and see a show"

—he didn't notice that he was saying "show" again, instead of "theatre"—"and have a little supper here afterwards. I'd suggest a restaurant, but there'd be no time to eat anything before we were turned out."

"What would your landlady say?"

"I've sounded her. I said, 'I suppose you wouldn't think there was any harm in my bringing two ladies in to supper after the show one evening?' 'Certainly *not*, Mr. Lawless,' she said. 'Would you like it hot or cold?' That's a landlady that *is* a landlady. Will you?"

"We'll see about it," said Miss Wilson.

"You might say 'yes,'" he begged. "Give me a happy memory for the end."

"But it won't be the end; we shall often see you, shan't we, if the piece runs?"

"Perhaps it won't run. And even if it does—I'm a busy man."

"Too busy to think of your pals? What do you do?"

"Are we pals?" he questioned. "I'm yours; but are you mine? Really? You've known me such a very little while."

"No longer than you've known me."

"It's not the same thing, though. You meet lots of men; I don't meet lots of girls. To me this week has been quite out of the common; to you it's only one of the fifty-two."

"What do you do in London?" she inquired again; "What are you?"

"A dry stick!" said Robert.

"Well, you aren't a dry stick in Manchester!" she said.

It was not a brilliant reply, but she couldn't have made one that would have pleased him more.

Yet the tea was a failure. She never ate cake, she told him; somehow she didn't care for tea either this afternoon—she sipped about a quarter of a cupful. He had scarcely stirred his own when she was declaring she must go. "You won't think it rude of me if I run away now?" He gave her her muff blankly. A creature of moods, as changeful as an April day! But when she was sunny, *how* sunny! The table looked pathetic to him when she had gone. He stood at the window, downcast; the signboard of the chimney-sweep darkened the road.

Mademoiselle Superba put the Simnel cake on the top of the piano, because there wasn't a sideboard, and it stood there uncovered till it was dusty. Then the night of the supper arrived, and there were a galantine, and prawns in aspic, and a mayonnaise; and the first thing the creature of moods did when she came in was to pounce on the dusty cake and devour a slice before she took her hat off.

"Peggy!" exclaimed the other girl reprovingly.

"I may?" she cried, flashing a glance at Robert. Yes, she knew she might! She knew she might do anything she chose there. "I'm going to have more light!" she said, and lit another burner of the gaselier.

Mademoiselle Superba—majestic in black silk, with pendent pearls in her ears, and her hair dressed like Truefitt's window—looked in for a moment to ask if all was well. Robert thanked her for doing it so extremely well. Peggy said sweetly, "I hear you're in the Profession too?" The woman was pleased at that.

So was Robert—it was nice of Peggy. Because there was no sideboard, cutlery and plates were set forth on the piano; because there were no champagne glasses, they drank the champagne out of tumblers.

"Didn't I forbid you to be extravagant?" cried Peggy.

He liked "forbid." "Forgive me!" he smiled.

"This once," she laughed. "But you must be very economical in London."

"I shall have no parties like it in London, I assure you."

"Nor I!" said she.

"Do you live in London?"

She threw him a nod. "Crouch End."

"Tell me more," he urged. "And let me give you both some salad!"

"More? Well, once we had a servant. Now we haven't. I do housework when I'm at home—I black-lead the grates. That's why my hands aren't pretty."

"Don't," he said, pained. Her hands weren't pretty, but he revered them now he knew the reason.

"Peggy!" said the other girl, dismayed. The other girl was obsessed by "manners" when she was out.

"I'm frightfully untidy in the morning. In novels the poor heroine always has on "snowy cuffs and collars" with her rags. Pickles! In real life the poor heroine has to think of the laundry bills. Oh! you'd be shocked at me in the morning. After the boys have gone, I turn a room out sometimes—my skirt pinned up, and a duster over my head! Can you see me? Mother's not very strong—the cooking's business enough for

mother. Then I go up to the agents', and try to get something to do. In a *very* smart costume! with a picture hat—I made it!—and white gloves. Oh! you'd be impressed by Peggy in the afternoon; you wouldn't recognise me in the Strand. You're not seeing my best clothes here, don't think it—I'm in an engagement, I'm stopping the expenses!"

"Peggy!" groaned the other girl again. He divined a kick under the table. "You're coming down to see the dress rehearsal on the 5th, Mr. Lawless?" she struck in.

"It would be a treat to me, but I can't; I've somewhere else to go."

"It would be a 'treat' to him!" pealed Peggy. "We shall be kept in the theatre half the night—we shall be dog-tired—and *he* would find it a 'treat'! What it is to be young! Where have you to go, Mr. Dramatist?"

"I have to go to a very dull public dinner on the 5th," he said. "I shall think of you dog-tired in the garden act when they serve the *chapon rôti*."

"Send us the *chapon rôti*," she said, "it'd be much more use!" She snatched a sprig of parsley from a dish, and stuck it in her hair—"Mother always tried to kill my passion for dress!" she cried.

He proffered her mayonnaise, and she said she wanted to play the piano. Though he feared that even a landlady who was a terpsichorean gymnast might have objections to her rattling "Florodora" at one in the morning, his spirits were high until she forsook the music-stool and sank to reminiscence on the hearthrug. Then she made his heart ache: she told him some of

her vicissitudes—no engagement, no money, no food. His eyes filled as he listened. What this girl had been through!

It was two o'clock. He saw his guests home. (Rain was falling.) "Good-night—good-bye!" he looked at Rumford Street for the last time—how familiar it had become! "Don't forget me," he heard himself whisper, clasping Peggy's hand. Her gaze assured him. She went in—the step was desolate; he turned thoughtfully away.

And as he walked back, to the room where she had been, he knew he was in love—with her, with the Theatre, with the life he used to lead. In the wet, black streets of Manchester he saw the naked truth, and he realised that his life was a failure. A man could change his environment, but not himself. He felt that he would be happier earning three pounds a week, like her, on the stage than he would ever be as Robert Blackstone, K.C. One mustn't say these things; but he felt it—felt that he would rejoice to be a minor actor again, and see Peggy in the morning, and see Peggy every day.

No Flies on Flossie tottered for six nights, died, and was buried. You may read those facts elsewhere. These are facts concerning *No Flies on Flossie* which you may read only here. And in Garden Court, Temple, there was for a long time a distinguished barrister debating a subtle point. He questioned if, when he made a trip to the past and grew enamoured of it, he fell in love with a girl, or only with an atmosphere. Because that he *was* in love, still in love, was indisputable; he looked back constantly and

yearned. The sole doubt was what he was in love with. It was the weak spot in the case, and with his usual keenness he had put his finger on it—he discerned how liable he was to be deceived, how naturally he might be attributing to the girl the fascination that belonged to the surroundings. If it was the atmosphere that lent Peggy enchantment, he would be insane to choose a wife so different from, say, the placid matron who blessed Edward. *Per contra*, if he loved Peggy herself, why should he tramp the room like this instead of asking her to marry him?

He swore that he did love the girl herself.

He trembled lest her halo was the limelight.

Then having come to a conclusion, he found her advertisement in *The Stage*, and wrote asking her to call on him "at Mr. Blackstone's chambers."

She went promptly. The dignified clerk ushered her into Robert's presence, and Robert had never seen that room look so gay.

"How good of you to come!" he exclaimed happily.

"How good of you to think of me, you mean!" she said—"I've been 'out' ever since *No Flies* finished; have you written another piece, and are you going to offer me a good part in it? I say, you do know swells!

"Who, Blackstone?"

She nodded. "Do you think he'll come in while I'm here? I was reading about him the other day—Miss Peggy Wilson would be going strong, meeting celebrities of the Bar! This *is* the Blackstone, isn't it, the K.C.?"

"He's a very recent K.C.," murmured Robert; "there's his new wig in that box."

"Oh, do let me look!" she said, darting radiantly. "May I?"

"You may even try it on, if you like," said Robert; "he wouldn't mind."

She had her hat-pins out in a second. "Oh, *isn't* Peggy going strong!" she laughed. "How does it suit me?" And then turning from the strip of glass, "Why are you so grave all of a sudden? Didn't you mean me to?"

"Yes, yes; I was thinking what a fool I had been not to beg you to come sooner," sighed Robert. "Take it off, and let me talk to you."

"Serious?"

"Very serious—an engagement."

"You *are* a trump!" she said; "I've wanted one so badly."

"Ah, but you mustn't accept this unless you like it, and I hope you won't mind its being a short engagement. Peggy, I love you. I love the ground you walk on, and the clothes you wear, and everything you say and do. Will you be my wife?"

"Oh!" she gasped. Her face was colourless.

"Can't you care for me?"

"I do care," she whispered, and—It seemed incredible, yet they were round her! and his heart was thumping like a boy's. "O my sweet!" he stammered, releasing her at last. Just like a boy again—"O my sweet!"

And her colour had come back, and she smiled up at him with a smile that no other woman had ever equalled. "Let me put on my hat before Blackstone comes in," she said joyously; "look what you've done to my hair—it'd give us away!"

"Peggy," said Robert, "*I'm* Blackstone."

The smile faded; she stood gazing at him wide-eyed.

"I called myself 'Lawless' when I wrote that farce, and then I chucked writing and went in for the Bar. I had forgotten all about the thing for years when I got Pink's note, but I couldn't resist going down to the Call; I went as a lark, nobody knew me, I thought it wouldn't make any difference. And then I met *you*, Peggy—and it made all the difference in the world! Why don't you laugh?"

"You are a great man," said the girl solemnly; "you oughtn't to marry me."

"O my dearest dear," he cried, "don't you understand that I—the real 'I'—am the man you saw there, and that only you do see the real 'me'? London has forgotten the author of that piece, but he didn't die, darling—his heart's just the same, though he looks so different. Robert Blackstone's the man who wears the wig and gown, and can make things right for your mother and the youngsters, and who'll give you a title by and by, my love; but your husband'll be the bohemian who toasted the crumpets, and lodged at Mademoiselle Superba's, the terpsichorean gymnast! You shan't have time to 'wish' for anything—I'd like to buy the Earth for you!—and you must come to hear me 'speak,' and I want you to be proud of our position; but at home I shall always be the 'boy' who fell in love with you, Peggy, the 'Bob Lawless' who went to look for his youth—and found it!"

Beyond the open window, the flowers of the garden were bright in sunshine, and the fountain tinkled

dreamily. There was a nurse-maid with a child among the flowers; he knew with thanksgiving that he was doing well to marry.

"Will you kiss me again, sweetheart?"

"Yes," she said—"*Bob!*"

THE END.

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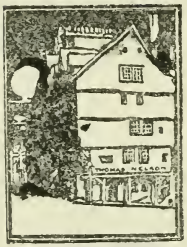

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FORTHCOMING VOLUMES.

MR. CLUTTERBUCK'S ELECTION. H. Belloc.

In this book Mr. Belloc gives us a brilliant fantasy of modern politics. He traces the adventures of Mr. Clutterbuck, a tradesman of Croydon, who by sheer accident makes a large fortune, is drawn into politics, is elected for Parliament and unseated; and finally, by persistence and intrigue, attains the ambition of his heart and a knighthood. The book is in the first place a capital story, in the second excellent fun, and in the third a very acute and often legitimate satire upon certain modern conventions.

THE LADY IN THE CASE. Jacques Futrelle.

Mr. Futrelle's "Professor on the Case" (published in Nelson's Sevenpenny Library) showed him a master of a peculiarly ingenious type of detective tale. This volume is a single story, and is concerned with the intrigues of the Latin nations to form a Latin League which will checkmate the Northern powers. The scene is laid in Washington, and the plot reveals how an American Secret Service officer and a beautiful and mysterious lady, who is the chief agent of the Latin League, fight a long duel, which ends in his victory and in a mutual falling in love. It is one of the best of recent mysteries, and may be heartily recommended to all lovers of this class of fiction.

ALREADY ISSUED.

THE INVISIBLE MAN. H. G. Wells.

This is one of Mr. Wells's most creepy tales. In the classical legend the man who found the ring which made him invisible could command treasures and pleasures at his will. Mr. Wells, with a wiser instinct, sees that such a departure from the habits of ordinary humanity would lead only to failure and tragedy. It is a book which when once taken up must be finished at a sitting.

THE SKIPPER'S WOOING. W. W. Jacobs.

It is late in the day to praise "The Skipper's Wooing." It is the most popular of Mr. Jacobs's most popular books, and has long been a classic. No more mirth-provoking story has been written in our time, and no more human and sympathetic study of simple folk. The publishers are glad to be able to add a second work of Mr. Jacobs to "The Lady of the Barge," which has long been one of the most popular volumes in the Library.

LOVE AND THE SPY. Mr. and Mrs. Williamson.

The welcome given to the Sevenpenny Library edition of "The Princess Passes" has induced the publishers to add another volume by Mr. and Mrs. Williamson to the Library. It is a story of high politics in London and Paris, and the action moves with all the lightning rapidity to which the authors have accustomed us. Against the background of international intrigue a charming love story is developed. No better holiday reading could be imagined than this light-hearted romance.

COUNT ANTONIO. Anthony Hope.

"Count Antonio" has always been a favourite work of the admirers of Mr. Anthony Hope. It has much of the gay romance of the "Zenda" stories, joined to much of the subtlety of his English comedies. Like Mr. Maurice Hewlett, he takes us to mediæval Italy, but there is nothing out of date in the interest of his tale. It is the eternal romance of love and loyalty.

COUSIN IVO. Mrs. Alfred Sidgwick.

The author of "Cynthia's Way" knows Germany as few know it, and in the present book she has woven a delightful story out of the adventures of a young Englishman who competes for the hand of a beautiful German countess. The plot is highly dramatic, and the pictures of German life are done with great sympathy and fidelity.

SHINING FERRY. "Q."

In this book Mr. Quiller Couch, forsaking the historical romance, has written a modern story of his favourite west country. It is full of his never-failing humour, and his heroine is one of the most delightful of his creations.

THE BLAZED TRAIL. Stewart E. White.

Mr. S. E. White has won a great reputation as a novelist of wild life among the remotest woods and rivers of the North American continent. His "Forest" (published in Nelson's Shilling Library) is a book of travel which no reader can ever forget, and his romances have the same memorable quality. In "The Blazed Trail" we are taken into the wildest corners of the continent in the company of men who wrest a bare living from Nature. It is a book full of the essentials of romance, and no lover of adventure should neglect it.

SHANGHAIED. Frank Norris.

This is a story of the Californian coast. A rich young San Franciscan is "shanghaied" and carried on board a whaling boat. After many adventures in the Pacific, he finds a derelict vessel in the command of a wonderful Norwegian girl. The story of their voyage together, their love, and the tragedy which ends it, forms one of the most stirring of modern romances. The author of "The Pit" and "The Octopus" shows in this book that he is as brilliant an exponent of the romantic as of the realistic.

THE MAKING OF A MARCHIONESS.
Mrs. Frances Hodgson Burnett.

Mrs. Burnett has won fame in two hemispheres, both as the author of "Little Lord Fauntleroy" and as a serious novelist of character. The scene of her present book is laid in England. It tells how the "poor companion" becomes a marchioness, and how nobly she fills her position. The book is full of that evasive charm which has made the name of the author a household word in England and America.

CYNTHIA'S WAY. Mrs. Alfred Sidgwick.

Mrs. Sidgwick has won a reputation as a writer of ingenious comedies. The heroine in this tale is an English girl of great wealth, who to amuse herself goes to Germany and masquerades as a poor governess. These studies of German home life are accurately observed and done with much humour and art, and in the background there is a charming love story.

INCOMPARABLE BELLAIRS. A. and E. Castle.

Every one who likes a stirring tale with sparkling dialogue and the fine manners of another age should read this novel.

CAPTAIN MARGARET. John Masefield.

Mr. Masefield, who has won fame as a poet, is now recognized as one of the most brilliant of our younger romancers. "Captain Margaret" is a story of piracy and desperate deeds in the Spanish Main. But it is no mere tale of adventure, though there are adventures enough, but a subtle and brilliant study of a chivalrous and sensitive mind placed in situations of desperate perplexity. It is a type of the new romance which is at once dramatic and profound.

THE HOUSE OF LYNCH. Leonard Merrick.

Mr. Merrick is emphatically *laudatus a laudatis*, for the chief novelists of our day, such as Mr. J. M. Barrie, are loud in the praise of his work. "The House of Lynch" is the story of the daughter of an American millionaire who marries a poor artist and repudiates her fortune. Her struggles with poverty, her misunderstandings with her husband, and the final use of the great wealth which comes to her against her will, provide the materials for an entrancing romance.

THE RIDDLE OF THE SANDS. Erskine Childers.

It is an open secret that when this book was first published the War Office considered it so important as to send a special commission to investigate that part of the North Sea coast which is the site of the tale. The book tells how two English gentlemen stumble upon a great international mystery, and after amazing adventures discover the solution. It is told in the simple, realistic style of a log book—a style which carries complete conviction to the reader. No one who has read the first few pages will lay the book down till he has discovered the secret behind the Frisian sand dunes.

THE GREY KNIGHT. Mrs. H. de la Pasture.

This delightful romance of middle age is one of Mrs. de la Pasture's most recent books. The great popularity of her former volumes in Nelson's Library—"The Man from America" and "The Lonely Lady of Grosvenor Square"—should ensure a welcome for a novel which is fitted to delight every age of life and every type of reader.

A SON OF HAGAR. Hall Caine.

There is no need to describe Mr. Hall Caine's work. His gift of vigorous narrative and picturesque description have given him the largest popularity of our day. "A Son of Hagar" is an excellent example of his earlier and best stories, when he was less inclined to point a moral than to write an engrossing tale.

THE PRINCESS SOPHIA. E. F. Benson.

Mr. Benson has won a great reputation and a large public as the creator of society comedies. But in all his work there is an undercurrent of romance, for he sees behind conventional masks and can follow the working of primitive passions. "Princess Sophia" is one of the best examples of his work.

THE WAGES OF SIN. Lucas Malet.

The publication of "The Wages of Sin" brought "Lucas Malet" (Mrs. St. Leger Harrison) into the front rank of contemporary novelists. The *Guardian* wrote on its appearance: "In reminding society that wages have to be paid by those who sin, and that those wages do not, as a rule, end with the sinner, Lucas Malet has given us a powerfully moral as well as a most striking and original novel."

THE SLEEPER AWAKES. H. G. Wells.

This fantasy, to which Mr. Wells has written a new preface, treats of the world in the far future. The hero goes to sleep for two centuries, and awakens to find that modern movements have worked out their logical result. He is emperor of the world because he controls its greatest wealth, but he carries into the new age some of the old ideals of the past. His desperate struggle against the tyranny of force and his heroic death are among the most wonderful chapters of Mr. Wells's work.

SET IN AUTHORITY. Sara Jeannette Duncan.

This brilliant book by the author of "His Honor and a Lady" is a study of the relation between the English rulers of India and the educated natives. No writer, not even Mr. Kipling, portrays the conditions of Indian life with a surer hand. The book is well worth reading, especially at this moment when the problem it deals with has become one of urgent practical importance.

BORN IN EXILE. George Gissing.

Mr. Gissing has a unique place among our novelists. He is the great portrayer of the life of the respectable poor and the shabby genteel. His realism is never sordid, for it is always redeemed by a high moral purpose and an austere and conscientious art. "Born in Exile" is a study of a young man of the lower classes who fights his way to a considerable learning, but whose creed is upturned by his love for a woman of another social sphere. Mr. Gissing has never written anything more moving or more true.

WAR OF THE CAROLINAS. Meredith Nicholson.

Mr. Meredith Nicholson has acquired a great reputation in America by works like "The House of the Thousand Candles," in which the threads of romance are woven into the fabric of everyday life. The present book is pure comedy. It is the story of two friends who find themselves, unknown to each other, assisting on opposite sides in a war between the two daughters of the Governors of the Carolinas.

THOMPSON'S PROGRESS. C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne.

This is Mr. Cutcliffe Hyne's most ambitious work. It is the story of the progress of a young Yorkshireman from poacher to mill-hand, and thence to mill-owning, high finance, and public life. It is a strong and masterful study of character, and like all Mr. Cutcliffe Hyne's work, it is full of vivid descriptions and picturesque incidents.

CLARISSA FURIOSA. W. E. Norris.

A delightful story of politics and society, and of an ill-assorted marriage which turned out well in the long run. Clarissa Dent is one of Mr. Norris's most successful female characters.

LADY ROSE'S DAUGHTER. Mrs. H. Ward.

In this remarkable novel Mrs. Humphry Ward has worked the life story of the famous Mademoiselle de Lespinasse into a modern setting. It is a study of modern society and high politics, and against this glittering background we have a very original and charming love story.

KATHARINE FRENSHAM. Miss Beatrice Harraden.

Miss Harraden, many years ago, made her reputation by "Ships that Pass in the Night" as a delicate and subtle portrayer of human life and an accomplished artist in feminine psychology. Without any cheap emotional appeal she has an unequalled power of attracting the attention and winning the affections of her readers. "Katharine Frensham" is an admirable example of this gift, and all lovers of sincere and delicate art will welcome it.

FIRST MEN IN THE MOON. H. G. Wells.

This is a good example of Mr. Wells's scientific romance at its best. It is a story of the first landing of mortals in the moon; of the strange land they found there, the strange government, and the strange people. It is a nightmare, but one without horror. Mr. Wells's imagination has created out of wild shapes and figments a world which has got an uncanny reality of its own. The story grips the reader in the first chapter and carries him swiftly to the end.

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A Son of Hagar.

HENRY JAMES.
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Miss A. D. SEDGWICK.
Valerie Upton.

ERNEST BRAMAH.
The Secret of the League.

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